THE LOST ART OF TAG TEAM WRESTLING

By Todd Roberg

With Foreword by Jerry Jarrett

For Buddy and Adam

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Introduction

It doesn't fill me with a lot of pride to admit this; but I am a product of Hulk Hogan's Rock N Wrestling Cartoon Show. Prior to that show going on the air back in 1986, I had never even heard of Professional Wrestling. The live action version of the animated series was the genesis of my fandom, but my greatest appreciation for the sport began to grow the very first time my grandparents kept their TV on when WWF Superstars of Wrestling went off the air, and I got my first glimpse of the National Wrestling Alliance.

I hadn't been watching the WWF for long, but the differences between the two products stood out immediately. The NWA presented their wrestling as more of a sport than their northern counterpart did. Something sparked my interest about the NWA that took me from casual WWF viewer to hardcore wrestling fan. After that exposure I became obsessed with wrestling; collecting every wrestling magazine that I could, watching every wrestling program I was able to see and spending lunch & recess periods with my friends emulating what we saw in the ring.

Not turning off the TV after WWF went off the air literally changed the course of my youth. Wrestling became my all encompassing reason for living, and of all of the wrestlers I must have seen on TV that night, the only ones that I remember vividly being awe struck by were the tag team of "Beautiful" Bobby Eaton & "Loverboy" Dennis Condrey, along with their manager Jim Cornette, known collectively as The Midnight Express.

I had seen tag team matches before. The WWF had a tremendous roster of teams back then, but there was something else about the style in which The Express wrestled that blew me away. The adage of "two men thinking separately but acting collectively" was demonstrated perfectly by the team.

I was officially hooked; not just on wrestling, but on *Tag Team* Wrestling.

The history of tag team wrestling is vast and goes back to the early 1900's in North America; but the last great era of tag teams was the 1980s. The 1990s provided us with some great matches, but there was clearly a decline which led us to the 21st century, where tag team wrestling as we knew it had all but ceased to exist; leading me to ask the question: What happened to the art of tag team wrestling?

Forward By

Jerry Jarrett

I started watching professional wrestling about 1950 and Tag Team Wrestling was very popular in the south at that time. I began promoting professional wrestling about 1956 and about this time I became fascinated with the history of the wrestling business. I was amazed at the different versions I got from men like Pat Malone, Roy Welch, Corsica Joe, Danny Dusek, and Sailor Moran. I later discovered that the background of the particular wrestler skewed the opinions of the history of the business. Roy Welch was the senior brother of the famous Welch brothers: Roy, Herb, Jack, and Lester.

Corsica Joe teamed with Corsica Jean and made the Corsica brothers famous or infamous here in the South.

Danny Dusek was a member of the Dusek Brothers.

Sailor Moran and Pat Malone wrestled as single wrestlers and both would have wrestled MMA instead of professional wrestling if their era had been much later.

Roy Welch explained that tag team wrestling began in Australia and was brought to the US because of the excitement factor of having four men involved in the matches at the same time.

Pat Malone and Sailor Moran's version was that greedy promoters who wanted to book inferior wrestlers that they could control devised tag team wrestling. To understand this version, you should understand that Pat and Sailor wrestled in an era in which the talent was in control of the promotion. In other words, the promoter was not the boss and instead more of a facilitator of the events. The promoter rented the building, advertised

the matches, and set up the ring and chairs. The promoters were not the bosses they are today.

Roy Welch, Corsica Joe, and Danny Dusek spent most of their careers wrestling in tag team matches and their version of tag team history is quite different. Roy was the promoter and very much the boss. Roy would explain that tag team wrestling brought professional wrestling out of the barns and into the arenas. Roy's version of tag team history was based on his promotional instincts; making money. Corsica Joe and Danny Dusek both enjoyed great success by wrestling as tag teams.

Several years later when I owned my own promotion, I began to understand that both versions were the correct version. A wrestling match between two professional and skilled wresters is a thing of beauty and an art form. A great tag team match can create so much excitement and entertainment that the fan is literally exhausted at the end of a match because he has expended so much emotional energy.

When I first began promoting professional wrestling and I had Lou Thesz booked, I would go to his dressing room for the match instructions. It was a matter of respect because Lou was a real wrestler. I did the same with Pat Malone or Sailor Moran. Over the course of my promotional life, I began to understand that there were sometimes a natural conflict between respecting the wrestler and drawing money. In the business it was referred to as, "not doing business". A really tough wrestler (shooter) would refuse to lose (put his opponent over) regardless of the effect on the next show's box office. I could literally write a book about the conflicts between promoters and wrestlers in that era. These incidences led promoters to build wrestlers they could control. The excitement of tag team wrestling would often hide the fact that a wrestler was lacking in some skills.

A promoter would often have a great talent who could not deliver a great interview. A manager was created to do the talking for that wrestler. In the 60's we could put two fundamentally sound wrestlers, who perhaps lacked charisma with a verbally gifted manager and suddenly have a super box office attraction. Please don't misunderstand the point I'm making. Not all tag team wrestlers were inferior talents. Some of the greatest wrestlers I've known spent a great deal of their careers wrestling tag team. Jackie Fargo is one that comes to mind. He spent most of his career as part of the Fabulous Fargo tag team. Jackie also still holds the record for the most consecutive sell-outs at the Mid-South Coliseum as a single wrestler. He had six consecutive sell-outs of 11,000 plus in a six-week period. I seriously doubt this record will ever be broken.

I recall a conversation with the great wrestler, promoter, and mentor, Eddie Graham. He advised, "Jerry, you and I and every other promoter are box-office whores. We will sell our business a little at a time for the almighty dollar. Let's hope we are both dead and gone before the end of our great business comes." What Eddie was talking about was the heart of the business.

The art is dying and we promoters are the culprits - Jerry Jarrett

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www.memphiswrestlinghistory.com

Chapter I

The Active ingredients

“A great tag team needs aggressiveness and a bit of vulnerability to convince people that they are human”
-Mac McMurray, veteran referee

Even those who do not follow professional wrestling would be able to tell you the fundamental differences between a tag team and a singles match. The distinction is that there are 4 performers working the bout instead of just two. On the surface it would appear that this is where the dissimilarity ends, however there are many others.

There are many components that make up a great tag team, but the most important one of all is the understanding of what makes a good match. However, before you are able to spell big words you must learn the alphabet; and before putting on 5 star quality performances you must learn the basic structure.

Most wrestling matches begin with what is usually called “the shine.” This is where the hero, or babyface, shows off to the audience his superior ability inside the ring; usually frustrating the villain, or heel, into some sort of dirty tactic. This dirty deed may be as uncomplicated as a gouge of the eyes, or as intricate as an outside distraction; but whatever the tactic, it will lead to control of the match.

When the heel is dominating the babyface this is called “the heat”. It’s during the heat where the story of the match takes shape. This is where the heel wants to anger the audience, but more importantly it’s where the babyface needs to get the crowd behind him, cheering for him to get up,

practically begging him to fight back. A great babyface will be able to accomplish this emotional reaction by selling the beating so well that he's able to garner sympathy from the audience. When the babyface finally does start fighting back this is referred to as "the comeback." Here the fans should get their payoff for all the cheering, clapping, chanting and stomping they did during the heat trying to rally the babyface. This eventually leads to "the finish"; where the audience is either vindicated with their hero winning, or they're robbed of said vindication when the heel wins, more often than not through nefarious means.

Similarly, a tag team match also has a structure to it that follows the same philosophy.

In tag team matches, the shine usually consists of the babyface *team* exchanging a lot of quick tags until the heels get frustrated by their own inability to overcome the precision and domination. This will result in something that leads to the heat, which will consist of a lot of *double teaming.* With the heel team working over the babyface who's been singled out, his partner is responsible for working the corner.

"There's an art to that too," explains Hall of Fame manager, James J Dillon, "you're not just standing there holding the tag rope, you're into the match much in the same way that I was as a manager. I'd try not to distract from what's going on in the ring, but at the same time if I'm sitting there and the guy who has paid good money to buy a ticket and sit in the front row [is noticing that] I'm not interested in what's going on…..then how can I expect [him] to get emotionally involved?"

The comeback should always be preceded by a "hot tag." This is a key moment in any good tag team match because it's what every minute of the battle has been leading up to. During the heat, not only is the babyface in the ring selling to the fans, but his partner – forever trying to reach for

the tag – is showing his frustration and anxiety over not being able to help the other. The crowd sees this and they begin clamoring for the tag to be made. If everyone has done their job properly, when the babyface in the ring is finally able to make the tag it usually results in a huge reaction from the audience.

Now with the “fresh” face in the ring its non-stop action as both heels take advantage of the five count and try to control the match two-on-one. However, fueled by the adrenaline that had been boiling for so long the babyface is seemingly unstoppable as he dominates both heels at the same time, much to the delight of the crowd.

The five count, by the way, is standard in tag team matches. The rules state that both members of a team can be in the ring for up to a count of five. The cadence of which the ref counts will vary greatly depending on what’s happening in the ring and how important it is for the count to be either slower or faster.

In most cases, the match will conclude shortly after the hot tag.

“A tag match is so simple,” according to Bryan Alvarez of Wrestling Observer Radio “At its core it's a deal where two men beat on one man, then one man beats on two men.

“It's even easier than a singles match because when the heels get heat on the babyface, essentially they are working together to beat on the poor guy two-on-one, like classic bullies. Then in the comeback, the fiery babyface beats up both heels, basically overcoming two-on-one odds, like a classic hero. It's the simplest formula in the whole entire world. Sometimes things happen and it can be hard to get the crowd into a singles match. But when you can't get the crowd into a tag team match, well, that actually takes some talent.”

Tag team matches can be worked to illicit a great deal of emotion from the audience, as explained by Smith Hart, the eldest son of Stu & Helen Hart, “A good heel combo should master how to double team a beleaguered babyface in the heel corner without excessively middling the referee and by the same token a good babyface team should know how to give the heels such opportunities.”

Even when a tag team is able to demonstrate everything they need psychologically to tell a good story in the ring, there are still other ingredients necessary for the team to be successful.

A great team needs *chemistry*. Both wrestlers need to work well together. “You have to be able to talk to each other,” says Dr Luther, a veteran wrestler of twenty-five years. “[You should] know what each other is going to do. I always tried to study my partner so I knew him and what he liked doing so I could be ready…. You also have to have no egos with each other. It’s a team; (you) win and lose together. That’s why two singles guys don’t always make a great team as they try to draw all the heat to themselves.”

When fans watch a tag match they are not looking to see separate matches where one partner steps into the ring and does his own thing for a few minutes and then tags out for the next guy to come in and work his own match. They want to see a collaborative effort; a match featuring double team action. If the two men don’t have proper chemistry it’s obvious and the audience can, and probably will, lose interest.

Like any duo or group in any form of entertainment, it’s important for the audience to believe that the two men would actually choose to work together. The fans don’t want to see a team acting as though they don’t want anything to do with each other. They want to believe these two guys train

together, travel together and generally fit together. This also helps in the case of the hot tag; the audience not only wants to believe that Robert Gibson needs Ricky Morton to make the tag so they'll win, but they want to believe that Robert truly wants to help his friend Ricky.

A great aspect of tag team wrestling is its ability to showcase multiple personalities at once. Not every team has to consist of similar styles and appearances.

"They don't have to have the same personality or style, but they have to be able to blend their individual traits into a formula that creates an obvious, single objective," James Beard, a veteran referee explains. "Good teamwork is about communication and each partner understanding each other's strengths, weaknesses and tendencies. Then, being able to take your blended characteristics and skills and make them work together. A good tag team creates a single personality from the two individual personalities and from that they manufacture a style that is always recognizable."

When two wrestlers compliment one another, this is an important key to a tag team's success. An example is the mid 90's teaming of Yokozuna and Owen Hart.

Hart was 220 lbs and known for his high flying and scientific ability. Yoko was billed at 601 lbs and known for being a powerful force. Two polar opposites as it pertains to in ring maneuvering, but together the team had chemistry and their differences in size and style worked to their advantage. What Owen lacked in mass Yoko more than made up for. Where Yoko lacked in mobility (though to his credit he moved impressively well, considering his size) Owen excelled.

A lot of great teams were made up of wrestlers who had differences in style and were therefore able to bring variety to their matches.

As with any act in professional wrestling, *marketability* is a big ingredient. After all, if the promoter can't make money off of you why would he use you? "There have been so many great tag teams who were very popular and successful [in terms of marketing]" Beard said. "Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage, The Hart Foundation, Roddy Piper and Paul Orndorff, The Von Erichs, The Freebirds, The Rock and Roll Express and The Fabulous Ones, just to name a few."

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s when wrestling promoters began to seriously look into other ways of making money with their talent; i.e. action figures, t-shirts, video games, etc, the marketability factor became THE most important component for everyone in the business. Could the decline of tag teams in the WWE be due to a notion that tag teams are not marketable?

If so, it's laughable. Vince McMahon himself has had several highly marketable tag teams. The Road Warriors for example, with their unique look and personas were custom made for toys, t-shirts and video games.

"Historians may hate this," Alvarez says, while discussing the most marketable teams in wrestling, "but the Edge & Christians and Hardys and Dudley Boys teams of the 2000-era, if only because the WWE marketing machine was stronger at that time than any other marketing machine in history, sold millions and millions and millions of dollars in merchandise."

The team of Billy Gunn and Road Dogg Jesse James; The New Age Outlaws, were a huge marketing tool for McMahon. This was a team that was made up of two different personalities, each with their own catchphrases and monikers which lent to the creation of individual merchandise for each man separately. The team itself had its own merchandise, and then being a part of the faction known as D-generation X,

the two men were able to hock that group's likeness as well. It's inarguable; tag teams have a proven track record of marketability.

There are many other components that lend to a great tag team: similar looks; matching gear or color schemes give a team a look of unity. A team name; The Hart Foundation, The Midnight Rockers, The Powers of Pain and The Blonde Bombers, to name a few; but as teams like Edge and Christian, Ray Stevens and Nick Bockwinkel, and The Bruiser and The Crusher have proven, it's not always a necessity.

However, the big three are essential; without marketing they won't make money, without the chemistry they won't be taken seriously; and without the ability to structure their matches in a way that will illicit emotion from the audience they won't be able to utilize the other ingredients that turn two wrestlers into a great tag team.

Chapter II

the best of times…

"The really great teams, the guys who refined the art, and it is an art, the guys that were great teams were guys who understood what you were trying to accomplish and were able to go out there and do it consistently"
-James J Dillon

There have been plenty of good teams in the history of professional wrestling, but a select few have crossed the barrier from good to great.

So what is the benchmark for a *great* team, as opposed to a good one? Veteran referee James Beard explains that "like great singles wrestlers, the great tag teams work consistently in style and quality regardless their opponents. It's a little easier for a skilled singles wrestler to create a good match with a lesser opponent than for a skilled tag team to do so with a similarly lesser skilled team because the teamwork is so important. Having an extra person to deal with makes it more difficult. But, the great teams understand how to make any situation work and can adjust to the inadequacies of their opponent and create entertaining matches even when they have to carry most of the match. How well a team can do this and how

the fans react to them is generally the difference between ‘good’ and ‘great.’”

Throughout wrestling’s history there have been great teams; teams that helped to define the era they were in. The Fabulous Kangaroos of Al Costello and Roy Heffernan were a great team and helped to popularize the genre in the 1950s through the 1960s. The 1970s saw teams like Gene and Ole Anderson, The Blackjacks (Mulligan & Lanza) as well as Ray “The Crippler” Stevens who teamed with both Pat Patterson and Nick Bockwinkel to form teams that were nothing short of “great.”

As the decade of the 1980s dawned no one suspected how many changes the sport would go through over the following ten years; Vince McMahon’s national expansion, the death of most territories, the admission that pro wrestling was a work, and pay-per-view. A lot of game changing events took place during the 1980s, some good and some bad, but it was the last decade wherein tag teams would be held in such high regard.

Most of the changes in professional wrestling introduced in the 1980s can be explained logically. Wrestling purists may not have liked Vince McMahon testifying to the New Jersey state athletic commission that professional wrestling was entertainment, not true sport, but his motives were simple: to be allowed to run shows in New Jersey without the pesky commission regulating his events. However, one would be hard pressed to find any logic in the practical demise of tag team wrestling during the decade.

Okay, technically tag team wrestling was still going strong in the 1990s as well, with a few great teams like The Steiner Brothers and The Heavenly Bodies along with teams that crossed over from the 80s such as The Hart Foundation and The Road Warriors; but as far as prominent roles

for tag team wrestling? Well, those died with parachute pants, Rubik's cubes and Molly Ringwald's movie career.

Ah, yes, the 1980's were a tag team fan's dream. The decade produced duos that exemplified the true art of tag team wrestling.

The Hart Foundation, for example, was comprised of two totally different wrestlers. Bret Hart was a technician whose in ring performances earned him high praise as one of the best scientific wrestlers of the time. Jim Neidhart, however, was a tank; a big, ruthless brawler. The two were polar opposites but comprised a great team who, when matched with the right opponents, could deliver such diverse styles at one time. The fans could feel they were seeing two totally different matches while staying within the context of one bout.

There are few teams, if any, that can rival The Midnight Express for pure sleekness. There were actually several versions of The Midnight Express, but in the 1980s it was the combination of Beautiful Bobby Eaton and Loverboy Dennis Condrey, along with manager Jim Cornette, who helped to define the era of greatness in tag team wrestling. Legendary wrestler, broadcaster and trainer Les Thatcher described the team as being 'the whole package.'

"I don't know that there was ever a smoother worker than Bobby Eaton. Dennis complimented him in his style and of course Cornette was the icing on the cake. They were very good, they knew how to get heat; they knew also how to get the babyfaces over so that (when they won) they had beaten *somebody.* They didn't just go out there and squash people and knock people around…They were wrestlers but they gave you the impression that the babyfaces could out wrestle them and so to offset that

they had to be sneaky and underhanded and they got the job done, they got a lot of heat!"

When Condrey left the group, "Sweet" Stan Lane was named his replacement. Lane was no stranger to tag teams himself, as he along with Steve Keirn were very successful throughout the southern territories as The Fabulous Ones. Lane brought in his own unique style, as well as a look which lent to the team's overall image. The combinations of Eaton and Condrey and Eaton and Lane were diversely different from one another, yet the overall presentation of The Midnight Express remained the same; showing some of the most innovative teamwork that wrestling has ever seen.

The Midnight Express had many great battles throughout their existence, but their greatest rivals came in the form of a tag team they feuded with for years: The Rock N Roll Express.

Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson were the quintessential babyface tag team that any student of the sport should study and learn from.

Morton's youthful good looks made him very popular with the ladies; his small stature made it easy for him to get sympathy when he was being beaten on by the heel team they were opposing.

"When I teach and I talk about babyfaces being able to sell and make their comebacks properly, Ricky Morton is one of the guys I talk about" Thatcher said. "He was what we called, back in the day, a white meat babyface. He got the little girls and the grandmothers behind him and upset because he was getting knocked around and Robert is the guy who made the comebacks."

Gimmick wise, the team came along at the perfect time. Rock N Roll and MTV were huge among younger viewers. To young teenage fans,

Ricky and Robert represented them; they could identify with them. RNR were not the monsters that The Road Warriors were, they weren't the traditional grapplers that The Andersons were; they were just like the kids who tuned in to watch wrestling on TV. They dressed like them and looked like them (remember this was the 1980s so EVERYONE was rocking the mullet).

"It's amazing to me that after all those years that when I was doing Smoky (Mountain Wrestling) TV," Thatcher continued "even then when that music would play, in that part of the country, the people just came unglued and I mean those guys were over!"

Of course, you can't mention Rock N Roll and tag team wrestling in the same breath without discussing The Fabulous Freebirds, a group that James Beard worked with for years and described as a team who "had it all; power, charisma, skill, all the intangibles!"

Primarily, Michael Hayes, Terry Gordy and Buddy Jack Roberts worked so well together because of one reason; chemistry. Each version of the group appeared to be friends who not only worked very well together in the ring, but the audience could easily see them hanging out with each other as friends. It was easy to buy the team as a group of hell raisers who would hit up any dive bar on a Saturday night, listen to some Skynyrd, drink some Jack, play some pool and start a fight. They genuinely appeared to be the best of friends who enjoyed what they did.

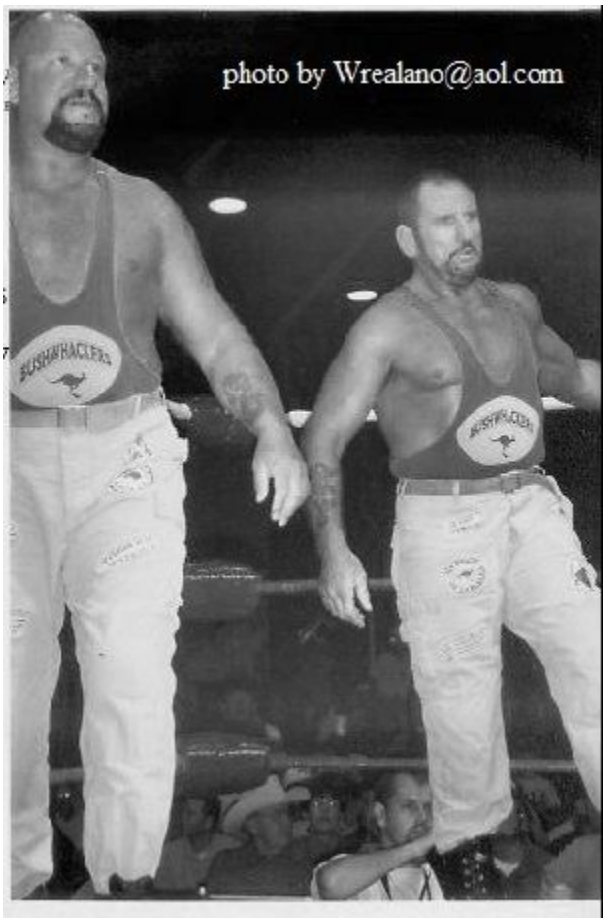
"The concept was different, it was unusual, it was good. Michael was a hell of a talker. Buddy was a very solid worker, but it was Terry that was the one who made a huge difference, I think," Thatcher says. "Everybody had their role, Michael was the flamboyant guy, Buddy the grizzled veteran and Terry was supposedly a big dumb guy who kicked everybody's ass."

As a unit each guy brought something to the team. There was no weak link.

The Road Warriors, Hawk & Animal were inarguably the most dominant team of the 1980's and a huge force in professional wrestling throughout the 1990's. Their team was a top draw in the AWA & NWA during a time when both promotions were trying to compete with Vince McMahon's WWF, and continued their relevance up to the Monday Night Wars where they were featured on WCW Nitro before jumping ship to the WWF's Monday Night Raw.

"These were two guys who looked like, as individuals, could destroy you," notes independent wrestling stand out Adam Cole. "Put them together on a poster and in the ring, and you've certainly got my attention and interest."

The "Legion of Doom" headlined huge venues and big events throughout their time as a tag team, featured heavily in Great American Bashes, Starrcades, and Wrestlemanias. With their trademark painted faces, Mohawk haircut (or reverse Mohawk in Hawk's case), large physiques, spiked leather gear and ever present manager Precious Paul Ellering, the Road Warriors are the perfect argument to anyone who would suggest that a tag team can't be a big box office attraction.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Chapter iii

…the worst of times

"You can have talented performers but unless they're put over properly and built up properly then it doesn't matter, their not going to get over."
-Les Thatcher

Since professional wrestling has become more corporate, wrestler's careers have been victimized by the ideas of those who have been put in charge of creating or "writing" the storylines. This, along with a virtual monopolization of the business in North America, has brought forth a whole new scenario that many wrestlers in the past never had to concern themselves with: what if the "creative" team can't come up with anything for me?

We have seen many talented wrestlers fall prey to the creative team's lack of, well, creativity, and in some cases it has cost them their careers. In many cases a wrestler has been brought up from the independent circuit, put through training and developmental, given a new name, a new gimmick, a new character, a scripted promo, new music, and a whole new look. The way business is conducted today is a huge negative, as Les Thatcher points out, "Today it's an assembly line business. The writers want everybody to do this, look similar, talk similar, so the individuality of the talent today doesn't really come out."

If the writer's appointed gimmick is a flop then it is the wrestler who is penalized and if he's lucky he's sent back to developmental to wait until "creative" comes up with something else for him to do. If he's not lucky he

gets wished all the best in his future endeavors and the paychecks stop coming in.

Tag teams have not been immune to this system, but there are also other factors working against them. The WWE and TNA, for example, seems dead set against putting in the proper time necessary to allow a tag team to get over. “Are there any significant tag teams?” Les Thatcher asks. “Not to my knowledge, but in part that’s because of the way these guys were packaged, presented, and showcased initially. They weren’t put over so they’re not over.”

You will never see an audience get emotionally involved in a tag team match which only lasts 4-5 minutes. There simply isn’t enough time to create enough heat to build towards the hot tag. The audience can’t fully appreciate the psychology and strategy that a tag team would employ to win their matches if said match ends just a few minutes after it begins.

So with the major companies not having the confidence to build the importance of tag team matches thus not showing much interest in building up tag team wrestlers, combined with the interference of the “creative” staff, it makes it very difficult for tag teams to survive in the modern day world of “sports entertainment.”

Take for example The Hart Dynasty; a team that consisted of two, third generation wrestlers from one of the most famous families in wrestling history. When she wasn’t wrestling, Jim Neidhart’s daughter Natalya acted as the ringside second for the team which consisted of Davey Boy Smith’s son David Hart Smith and their childhood friend Tyson Kidd. Kidd & Smith had wrestled for years internationally (under the names TJ Wilson and Harry Smith) as The Stampede Bulldogs, and were a true rarity in modern times; a seasoned tag team that worked like a well oiled machine.

It would seem that bringing in the third generation of the most prominent family in WWE history, other than the McMahons, would give the creative team countless potential storylines that would help get the team over. However, in reality the promotion's lack of interest in developing the division hindered the growth of the Dynasty's careers in WWE.

In the spring of 2010 The Dynasty won the WWE tag titles and retained them throughout the summer. The team was disbanded after losing the belts. Kidd turned on Smith and the two had their first match against one another on an episode of WWE's least promoted TV show "Superstars." Kidd won that match which led to a rematch on Monday Night Raw, which Kidd won again. Both male members of the team were relegated to mid-card status, with the term mid-card being generous. Smith was released in August of 2011 while Kidd remained with the company, and has been used as little more than an afterthought.

Things have turned out only slightly better for Natalya, who was on the receiving end of a push in the Diva's division including a tag team with Beth Phoenix, but that was axed in favor of giving Natalya the HILARIOUS gimmick of….wait for it….excessive gas. Yep, she went from being known as the first third generation female wrestler in WWE history, proud member of arguably the most famous family in professional wrestling to the girl with the smelly farts.

The Dynasty are far from being the only team that has been penalized by modern day sports entertainment. Many teams that had potential were seemingly swept under the carpet and never given a real chance. Brian Kendrick & Paul London were gaining a strong fan base with their high intensity and fast paced style; but they were undoubtedly considered "too small" for the WWE, which combined with the company's lack of interest in tag teams, spelled the death of this promising team.

Lance Cade and Trevor Murdoch were two young, capable wrestlers who certainly met the size requirements set forth by the czar of Titan Towers, but again due to a lack of any real tag division their talent was not valued.

One would think that teams like The Hart Dynasty, London and Kendrick, and Cade and Murdoch would have had a better chance in a different era, but let's be clear, not every modern day tag team would have succeeded in the 1980's. There were teams that, despite their ability and the strength of the division, still found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In the 80's the WWF had two talented in ring workers under contract by the names of Jim Brunzell and Brian Blair. Brunzell had been known as a member of the popular AWA tag team "The High Flyers." Brian Blair had wrestled for several different territories since making his debut in 1978, including two short stints with the WWF. In 1985 the two were paired together as The Killer Bees.

The Bees came to the ring in black and yellow striped trunks, wearing yellow tennis shoes with black socks and sequined jackets with bees on the back. They started using a gimmick called masked confusion; whenever one member of the team was in trouble and unable to tag he'd roll out of the ring and his partner would meet him. They'd both put on identical masks and the fresh member of the team would roll into the ring and catch their opponents off guard.

While the Bees were together in the promotion for 3 years, had several high profile matches against the likes of The Hart Foundation and The Funk Brothers, and performed on some big shows including Wrestlemanias, Survivor Series and The Big Event, the team never seemed to get a whole lot of attention from the promotion. Not only did they never

wear the tag team titles, they were rarely even considered true contenders; and at a time when the WWF had a roster of tag teams the likes of which it hasn't seen since, the Bees were never involved in any big profile feud. The two men were talented enough and the gimmick itself was unique enough that there certainly was potential to do something with them, but in this case it's believed that the burial of the team was more of a case of the WWF having *too many* teams. There was just no way for everyone to reach the status of The Hart Foundation and The British Bulldogs.

Some have said that the "Killer Bee" image and the masked confusion gimmick were silly, and they were; but the things that were considered juvenile in 1985 would seem Thesz-esque by 1995 standards; for it was the 1990s when professional wrestling became infested with creative teams and TV writers.

One year prior to the beginning of the decade, in 1989, the WWF brought in two of the most violent blood thirsty, rabid men to ever lace up a pair of boots. Luke Williams and Butch Miller, The Sheepherders, had a reputation world wide as one of the most brutal and feared tandems in all of wrestling. Of course, that wouldn't fly in the kid – friendly WWF; instead of being presented as a threat to every babyface duo in the promotion, The Sheepherders became a couple of fun loving, face licking simpletons named The Bushwhackers.

Another duo to fall prey to the "creative" team of WWF by being dealt a terrible gimmick was The Bodydonnas. The original Bodydonnas gimmick was intended for Chris Candido and Tammy Sytch, and it was a great concept. Both were young, beautiful and in great shape, and they would use TV promos to cut down the fat, ugly, out of shape wrestling fans. Tammy was called Sunny and Chris's name was changed (for some reason) to Skip. While the name change was inexplicable at least Skip is a real

name; but when Dr Tom Prichard showed up as Zip, that's when things went down hill.

The teaming of Chris Candido & Dr Tom Prichard could have been one of the great teams of the 1990s, both men were extremely talented and both had a great understanding of tag team psychology. Looking at their work in the ring during this time, past the silliness of two clones running around in matching gear and crew cut bleached blonde hair, it's clear their talent was undeniable. That said the WWF handicapped the team by making Prichard a Candido lookalike with a stupid name and by casting Sunny as the star of the team. The WWF was beginning to put more focus on the divas but with Sunny being the draw it didn't leave much for Skip & Zip once she was no longer their manager. They eventually turned babyface, brought in a transvestite, Cloudy, and not surprisingly disappeared shortly thereafter.

Les Thatcher had known both Candido and Prichard for years prior to the formation of The Bodydonnas team, "In that company they drew you a blue print and you followed that blue print. I don't think Tom ever liked the Bodydonna gimmick and that had nothing to do with Chris, because had you have put them in an old territory like the old Smoky territory or Memphis…they'd have gotten over like crazy."

While the WWF/E has perfected the shitty gimmick market, they certainly are not the only offenders. When they were in business, WCW had been responsible for taking many wrestlers with potential and giving them personas that one would have to be insane to believe would ever get over with a wrestling audience.

First there were The New Breed, Sean Royal and Chris Champion. The team may have had potential were it not for the gimmick that they were given. You see, they came from the future - 2002 to be exact - where Dusty

Rhodes was the president. The team first showed up in 1987 when the NWA fan base chose to watch that promotion because it was considered a more serious alternative to the WWF's "cartoon wrestling". So the fans never quite warmed up to the idea of the time traveling duo. However, in hindsight maybe they really were from the future; after all 2002 *was* just one year after Vince bought WCW and the year that TNA debuted. Considering the fact that Jim Crockett sold the company to Ted Turner less than a year after the New Breed debuted, one might wonder if perhaps they gave him a heads up on where the business was headed. Seems like they could have at least warned everyone in Atlanta to stay away from a New Yorker named Russo, though.

Then came the Dynamic Dudes: a team made up of Johnny Ace (yes, as in John Laurinitus, who would go on to be the person in charge of talent for the WWE) and Shane Douglas (yes, as in the foul-mouthed perennial kingpin of ECW). It was a gimmick meant to captivate the audience that WCW was going for; young kids. It failed. Miserably. The mostly southern wrestling fans were not interested in cheering for a couple of bleach blonde skateboarders.

Of course one of the most infamous flubs in character creation was given to the team of Richard Sartain and Jim Evans, known collectively and forever as The Ding Dongs.

When Jim Crockett sold his promotion to TV mogul Ted Turner in 1988 it was obvious that Turner would not have the time to run the day to day operations of the promotion. After all, he had other companies that were bringing in millions of dollars in revenue and as far as he was concerned Jim Crockett Promotions, or the National Wrestling Alliance, were nothing more than a TV show that had been a part of his cable

network TBS for years. He didn't need to run the promotion; he needed to find a producer to run it.

The obvious choice would be someone involved in the wrestling business. This was the perfect time to find a successful wrestling promoter who was looking for work since it was during the WWF expansion period and a host of them had gone out of business.

So who did Turner hire to come in and run his company?

Jerry Jarrett? Nope.

Don Owen? No.

Bill Watts? Not yet.

The man Ted Turner entrusted with the job of taking on the entire wrestling promotion formerly known as Jim Crockett Promotions was Jim Herd, an executive from Pizza Hut, who's only history in the wrestling industry was working for a TV Station in St Louis that used to broadcast the sport.

But Herd brought with him some *great* ideas to target the younger audience, and some of these examples of creative genius were given to tag teams; which brings us back to The Ding Dongs; an *ingenious* idea where two wrestlers were placed under pink masks and full body suits with bells around their wrists and ankles, and a big Captain's Bell posted on the corner of one of the ring posts. The idea was that when one of the Dings was in trouble the Dong outside the ring could ring the bell in an attempt to help guide his partner back to the corner.

The logic, if there was any, was clearly lost on the audience, but believe it or not it could have been worse; one of Herd's other ideas was rumored to be a tag team called The Hunchbacks, who were going to be a dangerous threat to any duo since it would be impossible to pin both of their shoulders to the mat. Get it?

CHAPTER IV

WHAT WOULD HAVE BECOME OF THE Heart break kid?

"The writers understand how to write, I guess. But to let them decide talent is taking a hell of a risk, I think."

-Les Thatcher

While many of the great tag teams in wrestling history have been comprised of relatively unknown wrestlers, or mid carders on the rise, some teams have been used to breathe fresh life into a stagnant career.

Tito Santana was, at one time, a top level star in the WWF; an intercontinental champion with compelling feuds against the likes of Greg 'The Hammer' Valentine and The Magnificent Muraco. However, after dropping the I-C title to rising star Randy 'Macho Man' Savage, Santana's career seemed to be on the downswing. The highest level feud he had going in 1987 was against a referee named Danny Davis; but then something seemingly unrelated happened; Tom Zenk left the WWF, leaving Zenk's Can-Am Connection partner Rick Martel without a partner of his own. The promotion paired Martel (who was already an established veteran and former AWA World Champion) with Santana and christened the new team Strike Force. The duo would go on to win the World Tag Team

Championship, and have high profile matches at Wrestlemanias 4 and 5, before eventually splitting up and feuding with one another.

Santana was a great talent, one who'd been with the promotion for many years; but if Zenk had not left the company, opening up the spot to team with Martel, it's unknown if Tito would have had any prominence at all in the late 80s and early 90s.

While tag teams can be a great place for veterans to rejuvenate their careers, many of pro wrestling's greatest legends first made their name in the tag team division. Dusty Rhodes & Dick Murdoch were The Texas Outlaws before going on to world champion caliber singles careers. Larry Zbysko was a rookie brought in by his mentor Bruno Sammartino and teamed with Tony Garea in the early days of his career. Pat Patterson was the first ever WWF Intercontinental Champion and long time right hand man to Vince McMahon, but before any of that he formed the Blonde Bombers team with Ray "The Crippler" Stevens.

More recently, two of the top attractions of pro wrestling's last big boom period in the late 1990s may have never been in the position to become main event stars were it not for their early success as "tag team specialists."

In the 1970s Stu Hart ran a territorial promotion in Calgary Alberta, Canada called Stampede Wrestling. One of the big draws of the company's shows relied on his use of his own sons. Eight of his sons went into the family business. In 1984 Vince McMahon was in the midst of overtaking North American wrestling and subsequently bought Stampede from the Hart family. As a part of the deal Stu brokered jobs for his son Bret as well as his sons in law Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart, Davey Boy Smith and The Dynamite Kid.

Now in the World Wrestling Federation, Smith and Kid - a pair of cousins from the United Kingdom, teamed with one another as The British Bulldogs. Hart and Neidhart were both used as singles and Bret, specifically, was floundering on the undercard. The WWF booker at the time Sandy Scott came up with a gimmick for him that was meant to capitalize on the old west image of his hometown, thus he was rebranded "Cowboy" Bret Hart. Hart wasn't pleased and offered an alternative. He suggested that the WWF team him up with Jim Neidhart and the duo could take on Jimmy Hart as their manager. Eventually Scott agreed and The Hart Foundation debuted, making an immediate impact by having masterpiece quality matches with the Bulldogs.

"The British Bulldogs vs. The Hart Foundation saga created some of the most dynamic and heart stopping, inimitable action that set new standards for tag team wrestling that have never been equaled," states Smith Hart.

The Foundation had a look which was very unique to them, an image that caught on with the fans and as a result of the team's popularity they rid themselves of the manager and became babyfaces. After a few years in that role and a couple of reigns as tag team kingpins, the two split and Bret was put into contention for the Intercontinental Title. After two successful runs with that title and the proven track record he had when teaming with The Anvil, he qualified for a total of five times holding the WWF World Heavyweight Championship.

It wasn't just Bret's individual success that spawned from the Hart Foundation team. Shortly after the split, Jim teamed with Bret's youngest brother, newcomer Owen Hart as "The New Foundation." A few years later when Owen turned on Bret beginning a family feud that would span over two years, he recruited Neidhart again and the two of them targeted Bret;

and even though the true draw was the brother vs. brother angle, the prospect of seeing Bret vs. Neidhart was a huge part of the allure to the feud. After Bret and Owen reunited as heels, they were joined by Neidhart as well as Davey Boy and Brian Pillman and the five of them resurrected The Hart Foundation name as an anti-American faction that faced all of the top babyfaces of the time and were the primary antagonists for rising star Stone Cold Steve Austin.

Shawn Michaels also made his initial impact in the sport through a successful tag team with Marty Jannetty, known collectively as The Midnight Rockers. Though initially many wrote the team off as nothing more than a rip off of The Rock N Roll Express, nobody could deny their talent and ability and propensity to use innovative double team moves; a skill the two were known to work on constantly.

Their time in the territories and the AWA caught the attention of Pat Patterson and the WWF. They were brought in for a series of matches but rubbed some of the other wrestlers the wrong way and after an incident at a bar one night, the two men were fired. It wasn't too long after that that the team was hired back again, and dropped the "Midnight" from their name. They had the ability to have critically acclaimed and audience pleasing matches with every team they stepped in the ring with and as a result The Rockers became big stars in the WWF.

In 1992 Shawn decided it was time to test his talent in the singles division, and an angle was shot on WWF TV where The Rockers, who'd been showing some obvious dissension, went on Brutus Beefcake's interview segment "The Barber Shop" to reconcile. The reunion was short lived, however, as Michaels hit Jannetty with what would later become

known as Sweet Chin Music and tossed him through the set's window thus cementing his new position as a heel.

Michaels, now known as The Heartbreak Kid, followed a similar path as Bret Hart, coming from the tag team ranks and becoming a contender for the Intercontinental Title before eventually winning that belt and then ultimately becoming a multiple time World Heavyweight Champion.

As for Marty Jannetty? "Marty was a hell of a hand," Les Thatcher notes. "It's just that Marty was Marty's own worst enemy and he couldn't stay out of whatever promoter's doghouse." Michaels, who spent plenty of time in the proverbial doghouse, on the other hand has become recognized as one of the greatest professional wrestlers of all time.

The juxtaposition of Michaels and Jannetty's post-Rockers careers has led fans and wrestlers alike to sometimes wonder which member of a particular team would wind up becoming "the Jannetty" when the two members go their separate ways. Often times the answer is obvious. When Brian Pillman turned on partner Tom Zenk in the 1990s in WCW, it was clear that Pillman would be on the fast track to the upper echelon of the roster. Pillman would go on to help revolutionize the cruiserweight division. He joined Steve Austin in a tag team called The Hollywood Blondes, which showcased both men's potential as top drawing heels. He was a pivotal figure in the early Monday Night Wars using his "Loose Cannon" gimmick; which created a worked shoot angle that led to him being granted his release from WCW so that he could be one of the first wrestlers to jump to the WWF, at a time when most wrestlers were making the jump in the other direction. Zenk, meanwhile, faded away into obscurity.

Sometimes however, it's not as easy to predict which team member will become the eventual star; such was the case with a couple of reality TV

“stars” Mike Mizarian and John Hennigan, better known as The Miz & John Morrison.

The Miz was not considered to be a very good wrestler. He was an annoying man who got the wrong kind of heat, which is to say the fans didn’t boo him because they wanted him to get his ass beat, but instead they booed him because they wanted him to go away. Not overly captivating on the microphone, not possessing any features that would make him stand out as a superstar wrestler, and not showing any exceptional skills when the bell rang, The Miz seemed to be very lucky to have been teamed with Morrison, who showed a lot of charisma and an amazing athletic ability. But it was in their matches together that The Miz began to develop a fundamental base which carried him over to a mainstream singles career. It is hard to believe that anyone would have predicted that Morrison would be the one on the undercard, while The Miz would go on to main event a Wrestlemania as the WWE Champion.

Rhodes, Murdoch, Michaels, Hart, and Pillman all went on to have very successful careers as main event stars. It is impossible to say where their careers would have gone had they never entered the tag team division; but it’s undeniable that their careers were not only launched as a result of their talent and hard work, but as well as the time they spent perfecting their craft as tag team wrestlers.

Chapter V

The dream teams

"Arn was a workhorse and I have to say the same thing about Tully, both of them were so great in the ring as generals and such great talent that I think they could have blended with anybody, then you have two naturals like that that are teamed together…the potential is almost unlimited."
-James J Dillon

Many great teams were designed by a promoter, a booker or another wrestler who had nothing to do with the team itself. Jerry Lawler and Jimmy Hart have both taken credit for creating The Rock N Roll Express, and Bill Watts put Dennis Condrey with Bobby Eaton and gave them Jim Cornette as a mouth piece, creating The Midnight Express; and Cornette, after Dennis Condrey left the team in 1986, wanted to replace him with Dr Tom Prichard; but booker Dusty Rhodes suggested Sweet Stan Lane instead. Lane may not have been the first round draft pick; but the Lane – Eaton combo was nothing short of fantastic.

In many of the office created teams, single wrestlers who didn't have main event status, were put into tag teams as a way to realize their true potential. This however was not always the case; to the contrary many promotions struck box office gold by taking two well established stars and creating superstar dream teams.

At the top of the list of any "dream team" combination is the duo comprised of Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard. The two were top

attractions for Crockett Promotions as members of the Four Horsemen. Both had already completed individual reigns as single titleholders throughout the region. Arn had seen a lot of success teaming with his "cousin" Ole Anderson; and Blanchard had, years earlier, formed a dynamic team with the late Gino Hernandez; but it was perhaps this teaming of Tully and Arn that would be the most prominent time of either man's careers.

Their wrestling styles complimented one another perfectly; Tully's "Superbrat" persona of the slimy, braggadocios heel coupled with Arn's "Enforcer" straight-to-the-point of going to hurt you style gelled so well that they went from being seen as two individual wrestlers to being a consummate unit that would go on to hold the World Tag Team Titles in both the NWA and the WWF.

Tully and Arn were far from the only duo comprised of main event single competitors; The Iron Sheik's reign as WWF World Champion lasted only one month, but was still very important to the success of the company. It was Sheik who was defeated by Hulk Hogan in Hogan's first title win. He then would go on to challenge Hogan several times in rematches as he'd done with both Bob Backlund and Bruno Sammartino.

Make no mistake about it, The Iron Sheik was a main event caliber heel; but a lot of his success was achieved by being paired with his tag team partner Nikolai Volkoff.

Sheik and Volkoff; a treacherous duo led by their dubious manager Freddie Blassie, dominated the tag team ranks not by using finesse and flash, but by using power and brutality.

It was the 1980s and American pride was running rampant. For every freedom hating commie, there was a flag waving, apple pie eating, good ol'

American hero; and in the 1980s no one waved more flags or ate more pie (apple or otherwise) than Dusty Rhodes, The American Dream.

Alright, fat jokes aside Dusty was the personification of the term *Superstar*. In Florida “The Dream” was born when he had a falling out with partner Pak Song and manager Gary Hart. It was then that ‘Big Dust’ captivated the nation, traveling from territory to territory wrestling in front of large audiences.

In the mid-80s Dusty gave that superstar rub to a man who many have claimed was being groomed for a future NWA World Championship; Magnum T.A.

Magnum was a star on the rise working his way through the Mid-South territory before coming into Jim Crockett Promotions where he sky rocketed into the main events with men like Rhodes, Ric Flair and Nikita Koloff. Dusty and Magnum kept their individual careers going but also teamed on several occasions against the likes of Ole & Arn Anderson, The Koloffs and The Midnight Express.

Magnum’s very promising career came to a tragic end in 1986 when he was in a car accident that he miraculously survived but left him unable to wrestle.

Dusty & Magnum were scheduled for a match the week after the accident against JJ Dillon and Ole Anderson. With everyone in the audience knowing that Magnum wasn’t going to be able to wrestle, there was a definite buzz. Fans wondered who could possibly take his place. Most probably assumed it would be a Dusty Rhodes ally like Barry Windham, Jimmy Valiant, Ronnie Garvin, or maybe one of the Road Warriors. The crowd’s buzz turned to pure shock when Magnum’s greatest rival Nikita Koloff emerged from the dressing room and walked proudly to the ring alongside Dusty.

Dusty and Nikita, The Superpowers, served the same purpose that Dusty and Magnum and Sheik and Volkoff had; they were individual stars that could main event against the world champion anywhere in the territory, but also focused on their tag team careers, facing the top teams of the day.

Fans watching WTBS saw Rhodes and Magnum not only talking about Ric Flair and their quest for the championship but also The Midnight Express and the NWA tag team titles. The importance on the division was evident.

The philosophy was simple, if the World Tag Team Championship was on the same level as the World Heavyweight Championship, then the promotion could draw more money by having a variety of wrestlers with the ability to produce big houses and main event the major buildings in their territory.

Of course, you can't discuss super power dream teams without talking about the biggest tag team combination of the 1980s: The MegaPowers. Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage did NOT come together to go after the World Tag Team Titles. Actually, they came together for the sole purpose of being split apart; which is *usually* a terrible and predictable idea, but in this case it worked to perfection.

Savage entered the WWF a few years prior to the formation of the team, and was coming off a long and memorable run as the Intercontinental Champion. Hogan was going on four years with the World Heavyweight Championship and had just faced the biggest challenge of his reign: Andre The Giant. This posed a problem for the WWF; the trouble was that Hulk had beaten all of the top heels, including Savage himself, and had just thwarted the biggest of them all. It was a classic story of the good guy overcoming the odds and prevailing in victory; but Hulkamania was far

from being oversaturated. There were more shows to be held, more money to be drawn, more Wrestlemania's to be headlined and that would mean the WWF would have to come up with a new villain for Hogan to be challenged with; but who could they possibly find to pose the next big threat?

The WWF had seen a lot of success in 1986 by having Hogan's partner Paul 'Mr. Wonderful' Orndorff turn on him. Their feud was one of the top drawing of Hogan's first reign as champion; this was due in no small part to the emotion the fans felt from Orndorff's betrayal. The WWF wanted to recreate that magic. Unfortunately, the Orndorff turn was still fresh in the minds of the fans. The promotion was smart enough to realize they'd need to take some time in building this story. Maybe Hogan and his new opponent wouldn't face each other the next year at Wrestlemania 4; instead they'd prolong the build up for one more year.

Hulk Hogan was the unlikely hero who saved Randy Savage from a three-on-one attack at the hands of The Hart Foundation and The Honky Tonk Man in an incident that would see the two superstars form the team known as The Megapowers.

A few months later Hogan would be "screwed" out of the WWF Championship, which would be held up in a tournament at Wrestlemania 4. Hogan found himself in the corner of his new buddy Randy Savage in the finals of the tourney to counteract Andre The Giant who was standing in the corner of Savage's opponent Ted Dibiase. The four men would be involved in another pay-per-view main event later that year at the first ever Summerslam. At the conclusion of the match special referee Jesse Ventura, who even back in 1988 was looking for conspiracy theories, alerted Randy to a lingering hug shared by Hogan and Savage's long time valet (and real life wife) Elizabeth. That was the subtle catalyst to the beginning of the end

of the Megapowers as Savage's jealousy grew and grew over the next few months. Eventually he turned on Hogan just in time to defend the world title against his former ally at Wrestlemania 5.

The point of discussing the treatment of Savage and Hogan is to point out what a promotion can get out of these dream team pairings. In recent years we have seen many cases where two men are "forced" to team together on an episode of Raw. Usually they are already scheduled to face one another at an upcoming PPV, and the announcers play their parts wondering out loud "how can these two men co-exist in the ring together as partners?!?!" The obvious answer is that they can't. The audience isn't dumb and they know they aren't going to. They know what's coming and that's why these teams, and more importantly these angles, don't mean anything.

When Hogan and Savage shook hands to form the Megapowers, viewers got goose bumps. When Nikita walked down the aisle with Dusty, the live crowd was in total shock. Dusty and Nikita never broke up; neither did Sheik and Volkoff, or Blanchard and Anderson, or Rhodes and Magnum. The one team that did was Hogan and Savage, and because the audience wasn't used to seeing it all the time, they drew one of the biggest pay-per-view buy rates of the decade for Wrestlemania 5.

Chapter vi

Tag Team
Wrestling Today
(The worst of times again)

"For whatever reasons, there just hasn't been a premium put on being a great team and wrestlers generally don't bother to establish themselves in that way because of that. Today, like society, it's more about the individual than about teamwork."
-James Beard

So where does that leave us today? What has happened to Tag Team Wrestling? Or perhaps more importantly, why has it happened?

With a genre of professional wrestling that has a proven track record of providing top notch matches, the ability to draw money, a method of establishing members of the roster, and a history of launching some of the biggest names in wrestling… it seems as though it should be impossible to write a book about the *Lost* Art of Tag Team Wrestling.

"The easy answer is because Vince McMahon doesn't like tag team wrestling," offers Bryan Alvarez, "Which is funny because when he was growing up, his all-time favorite wrestlers were tag team wrestlers."

Taking into consideration his own history of success with tag teams in the WWF/E, it's hard to comprehend why he would not be interested in

pushing it more on his audience. Is it possible that Vince has forgotten the success that his company has experienced with tag teams?

James J. Dillon, who spent years as Vince's right hand man helping run the WWF doesn't think so. "I think what's happened with the WWE is not so much Vince's logic that you can't market a team in the same way that you can an individual wrestler, it has more to do with the lack of depth of talent in the whole industry. You don't have the minor leagues systems like baseball does since the territories died, none of that exists anymore. They're trying through developmental territories but [there's] just [a small] number of people that you can develop doing that, it's a roll of the dice." Ultimately, Dillon concludes, it comes down to the ultra important TV time. "With the amount of programming that the WWE currently has, with their split brands on top of it, they can't afford to have a lot of talent tied up as established tag teams. And tag team matches *need* longer to build than singles matches do." Dillon explains that this causes a problem too, "nowadays the attention span not only for wrestling fans but for anything, people have that channel changer in hand and 400 channels to choose from."

To blame Vince McMahon solely for the demise of tag team wrestling probably isn't fair. After all, while the WWE is the largest company in professional wrestling, it's not the *only* one.

Another huge problem with the development of tag teams comes from the new style of wrestling today. From independent wrestling locker rooms where two guys sit down and script out their matches from bell to bell, all the way to Stamford, CT and the writer's meetings. They are trying to dictate what the audience is going to want to see; but lacking real clairvoyance there is no way they can know what the fans are going to want out of any given match until the men get into the ring. This style of working has hurt tag teams perhaps more than singles simply because instead of

having two guys wanting to showcase their own high spots, you have four separate wrestlers pitching ideas. They come up with more and more elaborate spots that may get a big pop from the crowd, but take away the fan's ability to suspend their disbelief and become emotionally involved in what they're seeing.

Independent wrestlers try extremely hard to capitalize on every single moment they get in front of an audience to do something memorable but, without realizing it, it's usually at the expense of psychology and logic, thus in most cases they negate their opportunity to tell a good story and get the audience emotionally involved.

A big detriment to telling a good story in a tag team match nowadays is an obvious lack of rules in the sport. Of course, talking about following rules in professional wrestling is tantamount to telling your neighbor's kids that they should turn down that obnoxious rock n roll music. Even worse, the idea of toning down the in ring action is usually frowned upon by young wrestlers who wrongly consider that being lazy.

Remember the basic structure of a match? Audiences cheer for the babyface during his shine. The heels take over and get heat, provoking sympathy from the crowd as they rally behind the babyface to make the hot tag. Then all hell breaks loose with four men in the ring leading to the finish that either leaves the audiences feeling vindicated or defeated.

Now let's put a modern spin on it. Let's look at a match that takes place at an independent show, where there is no semblance of rules and where each of the four men are looking to get themselves over: The match many times will *start* with all four in the ring brawling. This may grab the attention of the fans right away but after spending a good deal of time with all four in the ring they now break down into a standard tag team match, as if the referee finally stepped in and said "alright you four, enough horsing

around, get to your corners." The audience finds this odd and now the match starts to follow some sort of structure.

The babyfaces may get their shine before the heels start "getting heat." It's rarely real heat though, as the heels will take the time to do as many *neat* moves and *cool* spots as they can get in. The problem with the *cool* spots is that the heel usually needs the babyface, who should be selling the beating that he's been receiving, to be lucid enough to participate in the spot thus showing the audience that he is not in any sort of peril. If the heels do try to get any heat it's usually by performing a flashy crowd pleasing move, to which the audience has no reason to jeer because the move was so darn neat. The heel usually responds by nipping up and flipping the fans off – for *cheering* him, or he'll simply tell them to shut up.
This of course makes no sense.

If the heels perform enough of these moves and the babyface in the ring sells them well enough, the crowd will get hot; but who is the target of the heat? Logic would dictate that the recipient of the hatred from the audience should go to the *other* babyface since the teams have already established that there are no strict rules being enforced, therefore there is no reason whatsoever that this lazy bum should just be camped out in his corner waiting for a tag when clearly he could come in at any time with no ramifications and help his partner.

Finally we'll get the hot tag, though luke-warm tag might be more appropriate in many cases. Once all four men are in the ring the audience's reaction is usually somewhat lackluster since they've already witnessed so much chaos that they are actually immune to the "pier six brawl".

So if tag team matches now don't illicit the same emotion that they used to, then why would a fan think of a tag team match as a special attraction? And if the fans don't care about seeing tag teams then why

should promoters spend twice the amount of money on one match to give them four men instead of two? And if the opportunities to have tag team matches on the independent circuit are drying up, then how can two guys who want to have tag team careers have a chance to hone their craft and perfect their art?

Finally, if there are no places for tag team wrestlers to develop their skills, then how can anyone blame Vince McMahon? He doesn't control *all* of professional wrestling. Does he?

Well, actually, yes he does; at least to an extent.

While the WWE doesn't literally control the entire business, it certainly does influence it. If the tag team division was given the proper time on their broadcasts then the rest of the business would follow. There would be more opportunity for tag teams to work on their own development with the hopes of catching the eye of the promotion. Sure the psychology and match quality would have to improve, but there would be a reason for the independent wrestlers to work towards strengthening their own skills and building themselves into better tag team performers.

There has been a lot of talk of the WWE wanting to rebuild their tag team division, though Les Thatcher doesn't buy it. "If what they're doing now is what they call rebuilding they've obviously forgotten *how* to rebuild!"

Drawing from his own experience, Les goes on to explain that when he first went to the Carolinas in 1963 he lost practically every match he was involved in. He left the area for a while and when he returned in 1971, he and Danny Miller were the number two tag team in the territory. "The point is that if I'd had stayed there in '63 and just got beat every night I would have never gotten over as a top guy because the initial perception is the one that everyone would remember.

“So all the guys that are supposedly going to be [WWE’s] top teams now have been beat like drums, so they’re not [going to be seen as top talent] It’s not that they’re bad workers, it’s the way they’ve been presented. So [the only option is to] send them away, but where are you going to send them? They’re under contract so you couldn’t send them away if you wanted to!”

When asked what would be needed to ‘bring back’ tag team wrestling, Bryan Alvarez said “Vince will either have to start to care, which won't happen, or he'll have to give up power or pass away and his replacement will have to be a huge tag team wrestling fan.”

Since no one is wishing death upon the man let’s go with the retirement idea. It’s a foregone conclusion that Vince’s daughter Stephanie and her husband Triple H are going to take over the company when Vince steps down, so does that give us any hope? “Given that Triple H was never really part of a memorable tag team (I don't really count DX as a classic tag team, they were more of a faction), I'm not sure we're going to see a tag team wrestling renaissance in our lifetimes.” Alvarez continued. “Unless one of his daughters becomes a wrestler in fifteen years and he's too old to do singles matches but still wants to wrestle. Then maybe we'll have a father-daughter tag team headlining Wrestlemania.”

According to Mac MacMurray, a veteran referee, it’s pretty simple, “Go back to 'old school'. Period.” he said. “But, I think that old school fans have passed on just as old school wrestlers have passed on. The new breed of circus acrobats have re-educated fans to their way of wrestling. Some don't know an arm bar from a Hershey Bar. And that's sad.”

The entire landscape of professional wrestling has changed over the past 20 years. Yes, the 21st century has provided fans with some great singles matches that remind us all of what we loved about this sport during

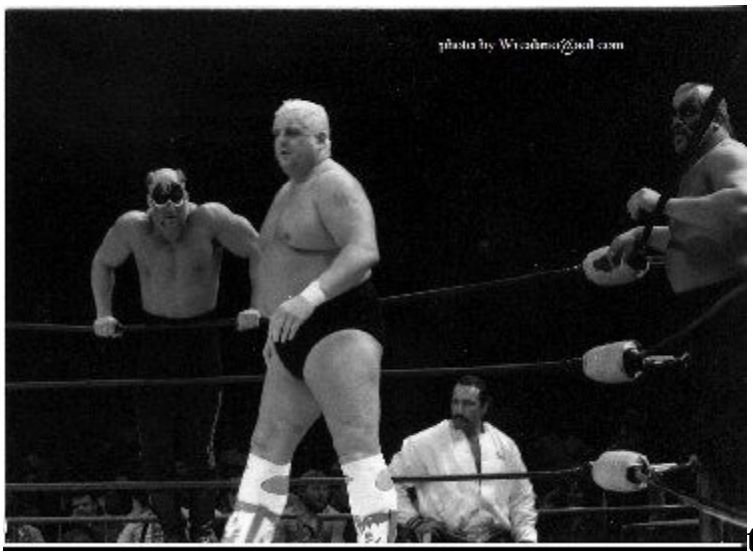
its heyday. Wrestlers like Daniel Bryan, CM Punk, and Dolph Ziggler can cause fans to remember the days when wrestling rings were filled with talents like Ricky Steamboat, Randy Savage and Curt Hennig; but for those of us who grew up with a passion for tag team wrestling there are no modern day versions of The Fabulous Kangaroos, The Blonde Bombers, The Andersons, The Fabulous Ones or The Heavenly Bodies. There is little hope that we'll ever again see a rivalry like Jack & Jerry Brisco vs. Terry & Dory Funk, or The Rock N Roll Express vs. The Midnight Express or The Von Erich Brothers vs. The Fabulous Freebirds.

There was a time when tag team wrestling was a true attraction. It was a genre that drew emotion, excitement and *money.* The art of tag team wrestling was the art of telling the story of two separate men working collectively towards a common goal; that goal of course was to win their match and eventually the Tag Team Championship.

But in the modern world of sports entertainment, winning means nothing. Titles are unimportant; but what possible reasons do The Dallas Cowboys and The New York Yankees have to go out and play if it's not to get into contention for the Superbowl and the World Series? Same goes for professional wrestling.

Writers can come up with some convoluted reason for two men to fight each other in a wrestling match a lot easier than they can come up with a reason for two teams to face off; so tag team matches are relegated to the undercard, and the fans and wrestlers alike are educated to not put much significance in tag team wrestling as a whole.

So, perhaps the answer to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter; what has happened to tag team wrestling and why has it happened, was already revealed in one of the first pages of this book. As Jerry Jarrett put it: "The art is dying and we promoters are the culprits."



the last great decade
Of
Tag team wrestling

“I’d probably say the 70’s and 80’s were the greatest decades for tag team wrestling, overall. There were certainly some great teams from earlier and since, but during those two decades, I believe tag team wrestling hit it’s greatest peak and was most popular as well as that timeframe producing the most teams you’d have to consider the

greatest of all time”
-James Beard

By the dawn of the 1980s tag team wrestling seemed to be stronger than ever before. The decades that preceded the 80s gave way to a strong division throughout wrestling, and while the 90s had plenty of great players by then the genre was already being shoved down into the mid-card.

The 1980s undoubtedly saw some of the greatest tag team combinations to step into the ring. There are far too many to feature in this book; teams who were top attractions in the United States, like The Midnight Rockers, Jack & Jerry Brisco, Demolition, and The Fantastics, as well as internationally renowned teams like The British Bulldogs, Bruiser Brody & Stan Hansen, Jumbo Tsuruta & Yoshiaki Yatsu, and so many others.

The teams profiled in this chapter are here because of the mark they made on professional wrestling, whether it was through longevity, like The Sheepherders; immense popularity, like The Rock N Roll Express and The Road Warriors; consistent quality of matches like The Horsemen and The Midnight Express; or overall influence on the rest of the business, like The Freebirds and The Hart Foundation.

Here we can look back at some of the classic teams of the last great decade in Tag Team Wrestling.

The Fabulous Freebirds

The Freebirds were made up of Michael P.S. Hayes, Terry “Bam Bam” Gordy & Buddy Jack Roberts.

Gordy was a big kid at 14 years old when he broke into the wrestling business. Michael Hayes was young in his career when he and Gordy began teaming up in Georgia. Buddy Jack Roberts was the vet of the group, starting his career back in the 1960s. Dale Hey (BJR’s real name) began wrestling as Dale Valentine, “brother” of grappling legend Johnny Valentine. Hey wrestled around the territories for years before coming into Louisiana as Buddy Roberts; the Jack was added as his nickname when he joined the team as a nod to his love for Jack Daniels whiskey.

The trio came together in 1979 and spent their early years in Georgia Championship Wrestling where they won the tag titles and instigated what is still to this day known as The Freebird Rule; wherein a team with 3 members can pick which 2 members are going to defend their championship prior to the beginning of the match.

During their reign as champions Gordy injured Ted Dibiase by piledriving him on the concrete floor. Upon Dibiase’s return he teamed with Steve Olsenowski and defeated the ‘Birds for the titles. After losing the belts, Gordy & Roberts turned on Hayes. Roberts left Georgia as Hayes and Gordy to feud with one another.

All of this took place back in 1980 and if that had been the end of the Freebirds then it's doubtful we'd be talking about them here; but it wasn't.

Hayes & Gordy reunited as a babyface team, but shortly after their reunion Hayes left and went to the Dallas Texas based World Class Championship Wrestling. Hayes was a very popular wrestler and he contacted Gordy and Roberts about reforming the 3 man group in the Lone Star State.

On Christmas in 1982 a huge event held in Dallas' Reunion Arena would be the catalyst to one of the legendary feuds in pro wrestling in the 1980s. An NWA World Title match between champion Ric Flair and hometown hero Kerry Von Erich was being held inside a steel cage, and babyface Michael Hayes was the special guest referee. Hayes attempted to help his friend Von Erich win the championship by dubious means but, Von Erich refused, which appeared to offend Hayes. As Michael was storming out of the cage Flair shoved him through the door to the floor. By the time Hayes got back up he saw Von Erich standing at the door. Thinking he was the one who shoved Hayes, Gordy, who had come to ringside, slammed the cage door on Kerry's head, knocking him out cold and allowing Flair to get the win. What followed were several years of a Freebirds – Von Erich family war which lit the state's wrestling scene on fire. The Freebirds were around throughout most of the 1980's primarily in the Mid-South region as huge draws for both Fritz Von Erich's WCCW and for Bill Watts' renamed Universal Wrestling Federation.

When Hayes broke away from the team, Gordy and Roberts replaced him with Iceman King Parsons and the Angel of Death as The New Freebirds; spawning a feud between Hayes and Roberts that carried over to the AWA where Roberts led The Samoan Swat Team to target Hayes and his new partner Steve “Do It To It” Cox.

In 1989 Hayes and Gordy reformed the group with Jimmy Garvin in World Championship Wrestling.

Garvin, now rebranded Jimmy “Jam” Garvin was a great and easy fit for the group as he meshed perfectly with the flashy heel persona that the team was known for.

The 1990’s saw some changes with the Freebirds as Gordy left WCW. This combined with WCW’s creative changes that were meant to attract more kids to the promotion in an attempt to compete with the WWF, led to Hayes and Garvin taking on more of a cartoon Rock & Roll image. Of course, The Birds had always been associated with Rock & Roll; Hayes put out an album called “Off The Streets” which featured the team’s theme “Badstreet USA” and a cover of “The Boys are Back In Town”. The success of the gimmick led to a very short stint in the WWF during the Rock N Wrestling Connection days of 1984 as a tag team being brought in by Cindy Lauper’s manager David Wolf.

But the 1990's version of the Freebirds were presented in a lighter style to attempt to be more comedic and kid friendly. This led to the addition of an entourage which included road manager Big Daddy Dink (Sir Oliver Humperdink), Badstreet (a masked Brad Armstrong), and Little Richard Marley (Rocky King).

In the early 1990s the wrestling landscape was far different than it had been just a couple of years earlier. It was undergoing a transition between the territory system and the more modern independent wrestling scene.

The Von Erich promotion in Dallas gave way to Jerry Jarrett's USWA, which also promoted shows in Memphis Tennessee and surrounding areas. This was an attempt on Jarrett's part to spread his promotion into other areas the way the WWF had been doing. Jarrett did not last very long in Texas and when he stopped promoting out of the Sportatorium a new group took over called The Global Wrestling Federation. With all of the upheaval between the changes in the WWF & WCW and the drying up of the territories around the country GWF was able to attract several top name wrestlers who were hoping that lightning would strike twice in Texas and it would once again become a Mecca for pro wrestling.

Around this time Gordy & Garvin reunited as the Fabulous Freebirds and won the Global Tag Team Titles on June 3, 1994. They held the belts until the promotion folded in the fall.

The Road Warriors

Prior to becoming professional wrestlers, Michael Hegstrand (Hawk) and Joe Laurinitus (Animal) shared many of the same interests including power lifting. While living in Minnesota, the two worked together as bouncers at a bar which is where they caught the eye of famed pro wrestling

trainer Eddie Sharkey. Sharkey felt the two powerhouses could make it big in pro wrestling and along with other Minnesota grappling hopefuls: Richard Rood (Ravishing Rick Rude) and Barry Darsow, trained the two for the mat game.

Laurinitus was the first to break into the sport using the name The Road Warrior, a name borrowed from the Mel Gibson 1981 film Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior. Laurinitus and Hegstrand were later brought into Georgia Championship Wrestling and presented by manager Paul Ellering as 2 members of his faction, “The Legion of Doom”, which also featured future wrestling greats Jake “The Snake” Roberts & King Kong Bundy.

The Warriors were a huge hit in the NWA territories throughout the 80’s and had successful runs in Memphis, TN and the AWA as well. As the territories around the United States began to dry up in the latter part of the decade the team continued to be major players for Jim Crockett promotions on Superstation WTBS. The Warriors were strong babyfaces and teamed with the likes of Dusty Rhodes (whom they held the World Six Man Tag Team Championship with) Nikita Koloff, Sting, Lex Luger & Magnum TA in battles with The Four Horsemen, The Midnight Express and the Koloffs.

In 1988 the Warriors turned heel on long time friend and perennial babyface Dusty Rhodes. This led to a feud and match against Dusty and his partner Sting at Starrcade 88.

The Warriors did not stay heels for long. It was very hard for them to be the villains. They looked like the baddest monsters you could ever encounter so it was easy for the babyface they were annihilating to get sympathy, but because of the monsters that they were it was hard for those babyfaces to mount a realistic comeback. The Warriors didn’t beg off or run away. There were few wrestlers big enough to toss the Warriors around after a hot tag; and it made no sense, logically or psychologically, for the

Warriors to have to cheat to win a match. Whether they were faces or heels the LOD were pretty much the same, monsters who said they were going to kick your ass and then they'd kick your ass; there wasn't much for the fans to despise.

The Warriors stayed with Jim Crockett promotions through the sale to Ted Turner but eventually left the company in 1990 for the World Wrestling Federation.

Up to this point the WWF had a habit of taking well known wrestlers from other areas and repackaging them to make the wrestlers more WWF-friendly. The main purpose of this was so that the company could own the rights to the names and images of its wrestlers. Few wrestlers who came up from Crockett's organization were untouched by the "creative" retooling. There were a few exceptions but generally wrestlers were given whole new gimmicks and personas. Terry Taylor, Big Bubba Rogers, Tony Atlas and Barry Windham were presented as new stars under the names of The Red Rooster, Big Bossman, Saba Simba and The Widowmaker.

Barry Darsow went through a change in character, previously known as Krusher Darsow, a Soviet sympathizer, he was put in make up and spiked leather gear and teamed up with veteran Bill Eadie (aka AX) as the Road Warriors knock off team "Demolition". So when fans heard that Hawk & Animal had signed with the promotion many were worried that their favorite ass kicking team would be rebranded in "McMahon-land". In actuality Vince & Co. used the old if-it-ain't-broke-don't-fix-it adage and left the Warriors alone, with only a couple of small changes.

The trademark black leather was exchanged for the color red and the name "Road Warriors" was dropped. The team was simply known as The Legion of Doom.

The LOD had a good run with the company facing top teams like Demolition, The Nasty Boys, The Hart Foundation and Money Inc., and also had a stint as the WWF Tag Team Champions. However, there were other moments that were inane to say the least. At Wrestlemania 8 the LOD was finally joined by their long time manager Precious Paul Ellering. For long time fans it was great to see the trio back together again; but then in the summer of 1992 Ellering brought a 4th member into the group; Rocco.

Explained away as being a huge part of the LOD's youth, Rocco was a ventriloquist dummy that was operated by Ellering at ringside and would at opportune times look directly into the camera during the LOD matches. What was the point of Rocco? No one ever knew. The Federation couldn't even claim it was used for merchandizing purposes as they had done in the past with wrestlers like Jim Duggan, who brought a 2X4 to ringside so the WWF could sell foam 2X4s at live shows, or George Steele who befriended a stuffed animal named "Mine" so the WWF could sell Mine dolls to children; there was never a Rocco doll. It was just a dummy that sat at ringside with no real purpose whatsoever.

The WWF seemed undecided on whether or not they wanted to present the LOD as the massive force that they had always been, or were hell bent on completely ruining the image. Years after the Rocco incident, the LOD were in an angle meant to capitalize on the *always* entertaining dark side of professional wrestling. It focused on Hawk's personal issues with drugs and alcohol abuse and showed him in a very negative light. Long time fans of the LOD were sickened as Hawk was seen collapsing on the ramp while heading to the ring, passing out during matches and segments and eventually attempting suicide by trying to jump off of the massive Titan Tron on a live episode of Raw (which resulted in him

“falling” off on the opposite side with some fairly ridiculous special effects making the whole scene more comedic than dramatic).

It appeared as though this storyline was to lead to a split between the two partners, but Hawk & Animal reportedly put an end to the whole angle. The fans never saw a Hawk vs. Animal match, which is a good thing. Much like the Rock N Roll Express, fans just didn’t want to see the team split up. They enjoyed cheering for the LOD, and to break up the Warriors would have probably been as unsuccessful as the split between Ricky & Robert was for WCW.

The Road Warriors were a team that worked together from their days as rookies all the way up through the end of their careers. Wrestling for just about every major wrestling promotion that has ever existed including: WWF/E, NWA, AWA, WCW, TNA, New Japan, & All Japan, they are proof positive that a team can draw in main events, can be marketed to the audience, and can have a lengthy and successful enough career to rival that of any main event singles star.

Mike Hegstrand passed away in his sleep on October 19, 2003 from a heart attack.

The Legion of Doom: The Road Warriors have been inducted into 3 different Hall of Fames including the Wrestling Observer Hall of Fame (1996) The Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame (2011) and the WWE Hall of Fame (2011).

The Fabulous Ones

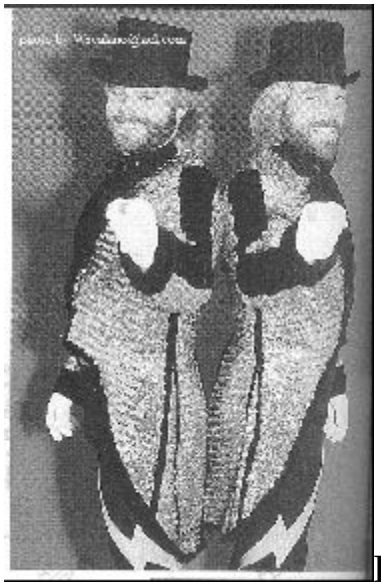
Long before Jerry Lawler was crowned the King of Memphis, “The Fabulous” Jackie Fargo was wrestling royalty in the city. A top draw throughout the country, an entire book could be written about Fargo’s

influence on the wrestling business. From the “Fargo Strut” which has been borrowed by names such as Ric Flair and Jeff Jarrett, to popularizing wild out of control brawls, which became a normal draw to fans of the Memphis wrestling scene, Fargo was an innovator. It’s no surprise that when it appeared he would be wrapping up his in ring career, promoters wanted to capitalize on his fame and name and pass it on to a new generation of wrestlers. Enter: Fargo’s Fabulous Ones.

In 1982 Jimmy Hart, the top heel manager in Memphis, began managing the team of “The Dream Machine” Troy Graham and Rick Mcgraw and called them “The New York Dolls.” It was obvious that the Dolls were “borrowing” their look from Jackie and his brother Don who’d wrestled for years as “The Fabulous Fargos”, and the imitation did not set well with Jackie. Fargo appeared on Memphis TV voicing his disgust over Hart and The Dolls stealing the Fabulous Fargo gimmick. Fargo said that he was going to bring in his own team and call them The Fabulous Ones. They were going to adopt the image of the Fargos; they were going to dress in tuxedos and wear top hats and gloves and even have the Fargo strut.

Shortly thereafter music videos began airing on Memphis TV featuring Stan Lane and Steve Keirn. The first one was set to Billy Squier’s “Everybody Wants You.” The footage that was shown was of Lane and Keirn mugging for the camera in various states of dress. Some shots showed both men with no shirts on and only wearing bow ties; in some they wore the top hat and in others they were wearing heavily sequined jackets and fur coats. Since they had yet to make their in ring debut, there were no shots of them wrestling, just several of them spinning around and pointing to the camera. In retrospect, watching the videos now, they seem very cheesy; but at the time they were original. No one in wrestling had music videos. All of this hype: the return of Jackie Fargo, the videos, the ready-

made feud with the New York Dolls; all lent to a lot of anticipation for the debut of Lane and Keirn as a team.



Despite the pretty-boy image, the most important aspect of the team was that they were the fighters that Fargo had said they would be. “The Fabs” fought in some of the roughest brawls in a territory known for having a wild, uncontrollable style of wrestling. While Keirn and Lane were far from enormous and did not look the part of the typical brawlers, they stood toe to toe with some of the biggest, baddest teams in the area.

In October of 1982, ‘The Fabs’ would win the Southern Tag Team Championship. They would hold those titles a total of FOURTEEN times over the course of the next three years, defeating such teams as Eaton and Duke Myers, King Kong Bundy and Rick Rude, The Bruise Brothers (Graham & Porkchop Cash), The Interns and The Sheepherders (Luke Williams and Jonathan Boyd). They would exchange championship reigns with The Sheepherders on twelve different occasions between 1983 and 1985. The Fabs had great success with The Sheepherders because the audience saw the ‘Herders as an extremely violent and brutal team of

brawlers, and while the Fabs did not look it, they had already proven themselves to be just as brutal when needed.

The feud with the Sheepherders (all three combinations) spanned several years and a couple of territories. In 1984 Keirn and Lane left Memphis and began wrestling for Joe Blanchard's Southwest Championship Wrestling in San Antonio, TX. The Fabs were brought in as the New Southwest Tag Team Champions, supposedly having won the titles in a tournament held in Australia. The tournament had actually never taken place. They were named tag team champions and presented to the audience on TV as the new title holders. Of course this was years before the internet and the so-called "dirt sheets" hadn't become very popular yet, so when the promotion told the audience that they won a tag team title tournament in Australia, the viewers had no reason to not believe it and no way to disprove it even if they didn't. Coming in as champions led to The Sheepherders reigniting their feud over those belts. The two teams would meet again after The Fabs left Southwest and had a brief stay in the AWA.

Keirn and Lane returned to Memphis where they picked up several of the aforementioned fourteen Southern Tag Team Championship reigns, and would come face to face with The Sheepherders again, only this time it was a team comprised of Jonathan Boyd and Rip Morgan. The Fabs left Memphis again and went to Championship Wrestling from Florida, where they were introduced as the new United States Tag Team Champions, having "won" those belts in another phantom tournament that never actually took place; and in a true sense of déjà vu, the Fabs were immediately challenged by, you guessed it, The Sheepherders. The two teams exchanged those belts a couple of times before The Fabs lost them for the last time to the last team to hold that version of the United States Tag

Team Titles, Kareem Muhammad & Hacksaw Higgins in December of 1986.

The Fabulous Ones returned to Memphis where they tangled with The Sheepherders yet again. However, the team was not appearing together as often anymore. If anyone was hoping that the Fabulous Ones would make a big comeback, and with the team's popularity there is no doubt that many fans were, they would be saddened to find out that after five years of teaming with Steve Keirn, Stan Lane was about to embark on a whole new chapter of his career wrestling for Jim Crockett Promotions and the NWA as Dennis Condrey's replacement in The Midnight Express.

Meanwhile, Keirn opened up a wrestling training center in Florida and began developing future wrestling stars including "Goldust" Dustin Rhodes and Diamond Dallas Page. In the ring, Keirn continued to see some successes. In 1991 he debuted in the WWF under the name of "Skinner"; an alligator wrestler who spit tobacco all over the place. He was almost unrecognizable in this new character from his days as the top hat wearing, camera pointing, sharp dressed Fabulous One. A couple of years later Keirn would take after his old partner and form a tag team with Bobby Eaton called "Bad Attitude" in WCW. The two worked well together and were a formidable team, but were never given much of a push and didn't last long.

The 1987 exodus of Lane to the NWA and The Midnight Express was not the definitive end of the Fabulous Ones, though. Lane and Keirn reunited after “Sweet” Stan and Jim Cornette left WCW in 1990. Cornette became the manager of The Fabulous Ones for a brief run in Memphis, which saw the team seemingly allied with Jerry Lawler, only to turn on him in an attempt to pick up a bounty that had been placed on The King’s head by Terry Funk. The Fabs would face the combinations of Lawler & Bill Dundee and Lawler & Jeff Jarrett over the next several weeks. Things came full circle when the end of The Fabs came after losing a USWA Tag Team Title match to Lawler & Jarrett where none other than Jackie Fargo was brought in as the special guest referee.

The Rock N Roll Express

Robert Gibson is the younger brother and former tag team partner of Ricky Gibson, who had a stellar career in the East Tennessee territory. The Gibson brothers teamed for a while at the beginning of Robert’s career. Ricky Morton, who also had family ties to the sport through his father Paul Morton, was a mid-card wrestler for the Memphis territory.

Robert Gibson came to Memphis and was teamed up with Ricky Morton. “The Fabulous Ones” were the ‘A Team’, so the RNR’s were used as the second main babyface team in the territory.

One of the biggest detractors for the possibility of tag team wrestling being as strong today as it was in the 1980s is the death of the territories. A tag team would be able to develop their act in one territory as an underneath team; once polished they could move on to main event in another area. The Rock N Roll Express were a product of this system. They started together in

Memphis before moving over to Bill Watts' Mid-South Promotion, where they met their greatest rivals The Midnight Express. The two teams faced each other in several great matches in Mid-south before both teams were drafted to Jim Crockett Promotions.

Now, with their talent on display to a national audience via WTBS, the RNR's and The Midnights were able to present a style of tag team wrestling that was faster and more exciting than what many fans were accustom to; and even with a faster pace they didn't lose any psychology in the matches.

In many cases, especially over the last 20 years, we've seen tag team matches that are fast paced with a lot of double team, high flying or high impact moves; and while the matches look nice and flashy they don't get the same emotional reactions from the audience as these two teams could. The major lacking component is the overall psychology. Twenty-some years later the Midnights-RNR feud is still talked about with reverence because both teams were masters of their craft.

The Rock N Roll Express left the NWA in 1988 and split their time between the AWA and Memphis. During this period the team had some high profile "dream matches" against the likes of The British Bulldogs and The Midnight Rockers. They returned to WCW in 1989 and picked up where they'd left off feuding with The Midnights, as well as the "new" Freebird team of Michael Hayes and Jimmy Garvin.

In 1991 while the team was wrestling for WCW, the unthinkable happened. Ricky & Robert broke up. Surprisingly, it was Morton who turned heel. Surprising, due to his masterful use of the babyface-in-peril routine he'd done over the years. Morton joined Alexandra York's 'York Foundation', a highly underrated heel faction in the early 90's wherein several wrestlers took on the image of corporate executives who got all of

their information about their opponents from a computer. The feud between Morton and Gibson was short lived as Gibson was released from WCW.

It's unlikely that the feud would have gone far anyway. As great as the York Foundation was as a concept, and as great as Morton was as a heel, the fans weren't ready to boo him and had no interest in seeing the two men fight one another.

Later in the year Jim Cornette started up a traditional territorial promotion based out of East Tennessee called Smoky Mountain Wrestling and he brought in Robert Gibson, who was no longer under contract with WCW. When Morton also became available, the two reunited as a team to a great reaction by the SMW fans.

The longstanding feud between The RNR's and Jim Cornette continued as Ricky and Robert feuded with The Heavenly Bodies team of Dr Tom Prichard and Sweet Stan Lane (later Lane would be replaced by Jimmy Del Ray).

The Rock N Roll's would take on Jim Cornette twice as their manager. First, when they all found themselves on the same side in a battle with controversial newcomers to SMW: New Jack and Mustafa Saed "The Gangstas"; and second, after SMW folded, Cornette would go on to the WWF which in 1998 ran a storyline featuring Cornette bringing together a stable of "NWA" wrestlers, including Morton and Gibson.

The Rock N Roll Express had their first (and only) appearance at a Wrestlemania during this time at Wrestlemania 14 when they took part in a tag team battle royal which was eventually won by The Road Warriors.

Morton and Gibson have remained together from that point and still appear from time to time on independent shows throughout the southeastern United States.

The Midnight express

The original Midnight Express was a team made up of Norvell Austin, Dennis Condrey and Randy Rose. Rose and Condrey were feuding with Austin in the Knoxville territory, South Eastern Championship Wrestling. On July 27th 1981 in Birmingham, AL Austin and Brad Armstrong lost the NWA Southeastern tag team championship to Condrey and Rose. Subsequently Austin turned on Armstrong, joining Dennis and Randy and forming a 3 man team called The Midnight Express.

This group would go on to wrestle throughout the southeastern United States, and capture multiple tag team titles, using the “Freebird Rule”: Any 2 man combination can defend the championships in any given match, as they saw fit.

This version of the Midnight Express teamed through much of the early years of the decade, before splitting up and going in separate directions. In late 1983 Dennis Condrey was one of several wrestlers sent from the Memphis territory to Mid South Wrestling out of Oklahoma and Louisiana as a part of a talent trade. Mid South promoter Bill Watts put Condrey together with another Memphis recruit Bobby Eaton and the duo formed a new version of The Midnight Express. Condrey and Lane were both more than capable in the ring; but the coupe de grace of the formation may have been the inclusion of manager Jim Cornette (also apart of the Memphis talent trade) that cemented The Midnight Express as a bona fide main event attraction in the Mid-South.

The team had major headlining feuds in the area, including matches against the teams of The Rock N Roll Express, The Junkyard Dog and

Magnum TA, The Fantastics, and JYD and Bill Watts.

Condrey and Eaton spent some time in Dallas working for Fritz Von Erich, but they rose to their greatest fame when they went to work for Jim Crockett Promotions in 1985. For decades, the Mid Atlantic region had been known as a “tag team territory”, and though singles stars like Johnny Valentine, Wahoo McDaniel and later Dusty Rhodes and Ric Flair would change that perception, the fans still yearned for good tag team wrestling.

Eaton and Condrey were a perfect fit in JCP and the fans accepted them immediately.

In the NWA, The Midnight Express met up with old nemesis’ The Rock N Roll Express and the four of them continued their propensity to having thrilling matches. In February of 1986 Bobby & Dennis won the NWA World Tag Team Championship from the RNR’s; but that did not cool down the feud. The two teams would face each other countless times over the next several years.

Big Bubba Rogers would join the team in 1986 as a bodyguard hired by “Mama Cornette” to protect her son. Bubba remained with the team until he left for the WWF where he became The Big Bossman.

In early 1987 Dennis Condrey left the team and the NWA. There are a few different explanations that have circulated as to why he up and left. The most common is that Condrey, Eaton and Cornette met with Vince McMahon about going to the WWF. Eaton and Cornette didn’t want to go, Condrey did. Dennis felt that since they’d already accomplished so much in the NWA they could go to the WWF for a year and then come back, fresh in the fans minds and have new opponents to work with. Still, Eaton and Cornette didn’t take the offer and one day, as both Cornette and Eaton have told the story; while departing from one another Condrey said “see you tomorrow”, and then he was gone.

Condrey went back to Colorado where he stayed away from the wrestling business for several months. At the end of that year he resurfaced and reunited with Randy Rose in the AWA. The two rebranded themselves “The Original Midnight Express” and took on a manager out of New York who’d been making a name for himself in the southern territories - Paul E Dangerously (Paul Heyman).

After Condrey left, Jim Cornette and Bobby Eaton were without a partner. Big Bubba Rogers substituted in some matches for the missing Condrey but Bubba was not the right fit for the team. Cornette has stated that at this time he was considering young Tom Prichard to replace Condrey. However, before he could even suggest it, Crockett’s booker Dusty Rhodes came up with the name of the man who would take Condrey’s place: Stan Lane.

Lane had been a part of another hugely successful tag team in the 80s called The Fabulous Ones, along with Steve Keirn, but the two were no longer teaming together. Lane was available and certainly fit the look of The Midnight Express. Lane and Eaton picked up right where Condrey and Eaton had left off.

In May of 1987 Eaton and Lane won a tournament to crown new NWA United States Tag Team Champions, a title they would feud with The Fantastics (Bobby Fulton and Tommy Rogers) over. The Express and The Fantastics had a series of matches which included a wild brawl at the first Clash of the Champions, which was broadcast live on WTBS.

In September 1988 The Midnight Express became incidental babyfaces when they had a series of matches with Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson, culminating in a fantastic match in Philadelphia wherein The Express beat The Horsemen for the NWA World Tag Team Title.

The Express did not hold the titles for long, though, as they lost them to the newly heel Road Warriors.

Shortly after losing the titles there was an incident that shocked wrestling fans. At the time there were three major wrestling companies, the NWA, the WWF and the AWA, and they never shared talent with one another. Wrestlers jumped from company to company when a better deal was offered, but in the days before the internet and before newsletters were popular, it wasn't public knowledge that a wrestler had left a company until the fans saw him show up in a different promotion; so fans were surprised when during a televised bout on TBS featuring Stan Lane, announcer Tony Schiavone told Cornette that he had an important phone call that was being patched through to the studio. Cornette was obviously upset by the voice he heard on the other line. He challenged the person saying "anytime brother…..you're a jerk and those other two are geeks." The viewers did not know who Cornette was talking to nor did Schiavone, who asked Cornette several times. Cornette ignored the question and did a great job of selling his surprise at what happened next as he threw off his glasses and screamed "Jesus Christ!!" as Dennis Condrey, Randy Rose and Paul E Dangerously (fresh from the AWA) hit the studio and attacked all 3 men, leaving Cornette a bloody mess on the TV studio floor.

The feud between The Midnight Express and The Original Midnight Express built over the next few months culminating in a "Loser of the Fall Leaves The NWA" match where the team of Lane, Eaton and Cornette took on Condrey, Rose and Dangerously, at the NWA's Chi-Town Rumble pay-per-view in February of 1989. However, Condrey disappeared again before this match took place and he was replaced by Jack Victory. As exciting as this feud was, the finale was a little anti-climactic since Condrey wasn't involved in the match.

The Express and Cornette remained babyfaces throughout most of 1989. Cornette became an “adviser” to The Dynamic Dudes while continuing his managerial status of The Midnight Express. This spurred jealousy from Eaton and Lane and eventually led to the two teams facing. The finish of the match was meant to turn The Midnights full fledged heels again, but since it played out in front of a raucous New York audience, who HATED the Dynamic Dudes gimmick, it didn’t quite work.

The plan was brilliant; Eaton was about to use a chain on Shane Douglas, when Cornette stopped him. He pulled the chain away from Eaton and then directed Douglas to “get him!” Douglas turned away from Cornette towards Eaton allowing Jim to nail him with the ever dangerous loaded tennis racket. Instead of eliciting boos from the crowd as was the intention, the racket shot got a huge pop, as the Midnight Express picked up the win.

After the heel turn, the team would face several of WCW’s babyface teams in 1990, including The Steiner Brothers, Tom Zenk & Brian Pillman, The Wild Eyed Southern Boys and of course, The Rock N Roll Express. However, Lane and Cornette left the promotion late in the year, leaving Eaton alone in WCW.

In 1991, Jim Cornette debuted his new promotion, Smoky Mountain Wrestling, and brought with him Sweet Stan Lane. Cornette teamed up Lane with the man that he wanted to replace Condrey with originally; Dr Tom Prichard. They formed The Heavenly Bodies.

Lane & Prichard were a great team. Talent and style wise they were among the very best of the 1990s. In 1992 when Bill Watts took over WCW, he worked out a talent trading relationship with Cornette and SMW, which saw Jim and Stan return to TBS.

The storyline saw WCW promoting an upcoming appearance by the current SMW Tag Team Champions, The Rock N Roll Express, including video of the RNRs defeating The Heavenly Bodies. The following week Cornette led Lane and Prichard out through the audience to interrupt an interview with Bill Watts and claim that he was going to sue WCW for using his likeness without his permission. This brought out the RNR Express and eventually Bobby Eaton as well. Eaton, Prichard and Lane would form a 3 man group for a short period of time in both WCW and SMW, until the working relationship between the two companies came to an end.

Since then there have been a couple of attempts at resurrecting the name The Midnight Express. Most notably during an “NWA Invasion” angle that the WWF ran in the late 1990’s. Cornette led the team of Bodacious Bart (Gunn) and Bombastic Bob (Holly) to capture the NWA World Tag Team Title in the WWF. The new version, along with the whole angle, was short lived and pretty forgettable. Bobby Eaton would later team with Rikki Nelson on the independent scene in 2003 as The Midnight Express, but again that didn’t last long as Eaton reunited with Dennis Condrey, at times, and Stan Lane, at other times, in “Midnight Express Reunion” matches.

On October 2, 2004 Ring Of Honor held a special show called “The Midnight Express Reunion” The main event of that show saw Samoa Joe defend the ROH World Title against Bryan Danielson, but just prior to that match The Express (Eaton, Lane, Condrey and Cornette) came to the ring to do a live interview. They were interrupted by Prince Nana, who managed a faction called The Embassy, and Nana introduced the newest member of the group; Ricky Morton. Morton’s appearance led to a brawl between the

Express and the Embassy in which Condrey, Lane, Eaton and Cornette cleaned house and received a standing ovation from the crowd.

On June 7, 2008 at the Phillips Arena in Atlanta Georgia, The Midnight Express (Eaton and Condrey with Jim Cornette) main evented the NWA 60th Anniversary show in front of a crowd of approximately 2,500 fans. They lost to The Rock N Roll Express.

The Hart Foundation

In chapter 4 we discussed much of the Hart Foundation's career in the WWF, but to not rate them as one of the great tag teams of the 1980s would be inaccurate.

Bret Hart was born into Canadian wrestling royalty as one of the eight sons of Stu Hart. Bret wrestled his very first match in 1978 when, at a show in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada one of the wrestlers was unable to perform. Bret, the referee for the show, was asked to replace him. Hart had an extensive amateur career and as one of Stu's sons it was always expected that one day he'd lace up the boots.

As a second generation wrestler, Bret already had the attention of the audience; but when he was paired up for a series of matches against British wrestling import Tom Billington, better known as The Dynamite Kid, he really began to take the spotlight and prove himself to be a force in Stampede Wrestling; and when the promotion was bought by Vince McMahon, Bret was one of the wrestlers that was signed to a contract with the WWF in the deal.

Jim Neidhart was a powerful wrestler who cut his teeth in the southern territories before moving up to Stampede Wrestling. While in Calgary, Jim entered in an anvil tossing contest at the annual Calgary Stampede festival. Winning that contest earned Neidhart his nickname “The Anvil.” Neidhart was also brought in as a part of the buyout of Stampede.

Hart and Neidhart were not brought in as a team; they’d never teamed before and no one planned for them to team in the WWF. Neidhart had Bobby Heenan as his manager, but did not appear to be heading toward anything great, and Bret Hart was seemingly an afterthought being saddled with a “Cowboy” gimmick. Bret suggested to WWF booker George Scott that he and Neidhart be teamed together as The Hart Foundation with manager Jimmy Hart.

Jimmy Hart first made an impact on a national audience not in pro wrestling, but in music as a member of The Gentrys when their song “Keep On Dancing” ranked in the top 5 of the Billboard music charts. In 1982 he was the manager of comedian Andy Kaufman as he traveled to Memphis, TN to battle with Jimmy’s greatest nemesis Jerry “The King” Lawler.

Jimmy Hart was the top heel of the Memphis territory up until 1984 when he left for the WWF where, even though he was far from the top heel manager, he saw much success managing Intercontinental Champion Greg ‘The Hammer’ Valentine, The Funk Brothers, and King Kong Bundy.

The trio clicked right away, Bret’s precision in the ring as a technical master combined with Neidhart’s brawling style was the perfect example of two wrestlers with completely different styles coming together and forming a great tag team. The addition of Jimmy Hart who was always vocal, not just in interviews but at ringside as well with his megaphone, completed the package.

The Hart Foundation made an impact once they started working with The British Bulldogs. The “Stampede boys” had some of the best matches of the 1980s and the promotion took notice. The Harts won the WWF World Tag Team Titles in February of 1987 with help from heel referee Danny Davis, which eventually led to a six man tag team match at Wrestlemania 3 where Bret & Jim teamed with Davis against The Bulldogs and Tito Santana.

The next series of matches for the Hart Foundation came at the hands of Strike Force (Santana and Rick Martel) who took the belts in October of 1987. The two teams would face each other several times over the next few months, including at the first annual Survivor Series in November, where they each captained teams made up of 5 separate tag teams.

At Wrestlemania 4, The Hart Foundation entered the battle royal which opened the show. In the end, the final 3 men in the ring were Hart, Junkyard Dog and Bad News Brown. As the heels, Brown and Hart double teamed JYD until they were finally able to eliminate him. Bret and Bad News appeared to be planning to split the prize money, but Brown double crossed The Hitman and eliminated him. This caused Bret to attack Brown and destroy the trophy, which began Bret’s (and subsequently Neidhart’s) babyface turn. Bret spent much of the next few months feuding with Bad News Brown and while the fans were now cheering Bret and The Anvil they were still “contractually obligated” to their manager Jimmy Hart who reportedly continued to collect a percentage of their earnings.

In the summer of 1988 Jimmy began managing the newly turned heel team of Jacques and Raymond Rougeau, which led to a feud between the two teams. During this time The Hart Foundation received a few shots at the WWF Tag Team Title, but were thwarted thanks to outside interference by Jimmy Hart and The Rougeaus. In Summerslam 1988 Hart was ringside

in defending champions, Demolition's corner and supplied his megaphone to the champs to allow them to steal the victory. A few weeks later, in a rematch on Saturday Night's Main Event, The Rougeaus interfered on Demolition's behalf. At Wrestlemania 5 in April of 1989, The Hart Foundation faced Jimmy Hart's team of Greg Valentine and The Honky Tonk Man.

It was actually a testament to how strong the WWF's tag team division was at the time that a duo like Neidhart and Hart had been together in the promotion for over five years and had only held the tag team titles for one 9 month period. At Summerslam 1990 The Hart Foundation defeated Demolition to win the titles for only the second time. They kept the titles until Wrestlemania 7 when they lost them to The Nasty Boys (managed by Jimmy Hart).

Neidhart and Hart rarely teamed after that as Bret began focusing on his singles career. Neidhart spent a short period of time teaming with Bret's younger brother Owen as "The New Foundation" before leaving the WWF.

Bret went on to a very successful singles career winning the Intercontinental Championship twice and then in 1992 took the WWF World Heavyweight Championship from Ric Flair in the same town where he'd made his professional debut, Saskatoon, SK.

At Survivor Series 1993 Bret teamed up with his brothers in an 8 man elimination tag team match which saw Owen turn on his brother. Owen enlisted Jim Neidhart to help him in his battles with Bret, which led to matches featuring Owen and The Anvil teaming up against Bret and Davey Boy Smith.

In 1997 The Hart Foundation would reunite in a huge way. Bret, who'd been estranged from his brother Owen since November 1993, had just turned heel. He recruited Owen, Davey Boy, Brian Pillman and Jim The

Anvil

Neidhart to form a super group of anti-Americans to feud with Stone Cold Steve Austin, D-Generation X, The Road Warriors, Goldust and other major babyfaces of the early “Attitude” era.

Bret and Neidhart would both leave the WWF after the controversial incident at Survivor Series 1997 in Montreal, Canada which saw Vince McMahon call for the bell during a world title match between Hart and Shawn Michaels when Michaels had Bret in his own submission finisher The Sharpshooter. Bret and Jim both went to WCW, but they were never used together. In fact, they weren’t used much, or at least not effectively.

Bret was injured during a match against Bill Goldberg in WCW and was eventually released from his contract. Hart would return to the WWE 12 years after the Montreal incident. Though he could not perform at the level he used to due to complications from a stroke he had in 2002, Bret did wrestle a few matches including a “No Holds Barred” match against Vince McMahon at Wrestlemania 26.

Jim “The Anvil” Neidhart spent the next several years appearing in different independent promotions around North America. His daughter Nattie Neidhart signed a developmental contract with the WWE in 2007 carrying on the lineage of The Hart Family in the promotion.

The Midnight Rockers

Like any genre in any form of entertainment popularity begets imitation. Tag team wrestling in the 1980s was no different. Some of the great teams of the decade inspired ‘knock offs’.

The Road Warriors, for example, created a look with their unique hairstyle, massive size and face paint that was original for tag teams. Teams like The Powers of Pain (Barbarian and Warlord) and Demolition (Ax and Smash) borrowed liberally from the look and persona of The L.O.D.

That’s not to say that just because a team steals another team’s gimmick, that the offenders aren’t a good team in their own right; but in most cases when put up against the original the ‘pretenders’ pale in comparison.

The 1980s saw the combination of rock n roll and pro wrestling come together like never before; as movements like the WWF’s Rock N Wrestling, events like AWA’s WrestleRock, and gimmicks like “Rock N Roll” Buck Zumhofe, all came about during the same time. And right on the forefront of the rock n roll invasion of pro wrestling, were Ricky and Robert, The Rock N Roll Express.

So it was no surprise when rock n roll themed tag teams began to pop up, like Tommy Lane and Mike Davis, The Rock N Roll RPMs; Rex King and Steve Doll, The Southern Rockers; and of course Shawn Michaels and Marty Jannetty, The Midnight Rockers.

In the case of Michaels and Jannetty, while their longevity and popularity as a team was not anywhere near the level of the originals, if you base a discussion solely on their in ring ability, the duo compares nicely to Morton and Gibson. In fact there would be some who would argue that the Rockers were better than the Rock N Roll Express.

Jannetty began his career in Central States Wrestling where he formed a team called The Uptown Boys with Tommy Rogers (This was actually Tommy Lane of the Rock N Roll RPMs, not the same Tommy Rogers who would go on to form the popular team The Fantastics, with Bobby Fulton). Meanwhile in Texas, young Shawn Michaels was gaining experience wrestling for Texas All Star Wrestling where he formed a team called American Force with Paul Diamond (Diamond would go on to form a team with Pat Tanaka called Badd Company. Later in the WWF the two would team again, with Diamond under a mask using the name Kato; this duo was called The Orient Express. And for trivia's sake Diamond was also under a mask while portraying a character called Max Moon, who was Shawn Michaels' opponent on the very first episode of WWF Monday Night Raw in 1993).

When Michaels was sent to Central States in 1985 he and Jannetty became friends, and when the spot opened up for them to begin teaming together they jumped at the opportunity. The duo won the Central States Tag Team Championship, defeating the Batten Twins, Brad and Bart. Jannetty and Michaels agreed that if either of them got the opportunity to wrestle in one of the bigger promotions they'd try to open the door for the other one to get in.

Jannetty was true to his word as he was booked in Verne Gagne's American Wrestling Association, one of the top three promotions in the United States at the time, and eventually brought Michaels in to join him. The duo was christened The Midnight Rockers.

Jannetty and Michaels quickly became a hit in the AWA and it wasn't long before they found themselves in contention for the World Tag Team Titles challenging "Playboy" Buddy Rose and "Pretty Boy" Doug Somers.

The Midnight Rockers chased the champions throughout 1986 before finally defeating them on Christmas Night in a bloody steel cage match, which unfortunately for Michaels and Jannetty was a match where the titles were not on the line.

Michaels has credited Rose and Somers for helping The Midnight Rockers get over. The heels allowed them to showcase their talents and prove they could take a beating and fight back.

The Midnight Rockers finally won the AWA World Tag Team Titles in early 1987, but dropped them to the Russian team of Boris Zhukov and Soldat Ustinov when the duo was offered an opportunity to join the World Wrestling Federation.

The Rockers impressed Pat Patterson and he recommended that Vince McMahon give them a shot at the WWF. Vince agreed and brought in the team, but the Rockers already had a reputation that hindered their relationships with other members of the roster.

On one of the team's first nights with the company they got into a confrontation at a bar with Jesse Barr (who was working as Jimmy Jack Funk at the time). Vince McMahon was probably overly cautious because he'd just started drug testing wrestlers after a very public bust featuring two of his (at the time, feuding) wrestlers Iron Sheik and "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan, and didn't want any unnecessary heat in the locker room; so he fired The Midnight Rockers.

Michaels and Jannetty regrouped and headed south again, this time to Memphis Tennessee, where after a short period of time the team turned heel for the first time in their existence. The Midnight Rockers would feud with The Rock N Roll RPMs for several months in the Memphis region. Eventually, the Rockers would return to the AWA and split their time between the two territories as heels in Memphis and babyfaces in the AWA.

The Midnight Rockers ended the year 1987 in the same position they had been in at the beginning of the year, as the AWA World Tag Team Champions defeating the Original Midnight Express for the belts on December 27. They kept those titles until March of 88 when they lost them to Pat Tanaka and Paul Diamond, Badd Company.

Shawn and Marty left the AWA after dropping the titles and much to their surprise were granted a second chance with the WWF in May of ‘88.

Now known simply as The Rockers, Jannetty and Michaels were promoted as ‘tag team specialists.’ They were featured on TV every week defeating different enhancement teams and their popularity grew.

Their first feud in the WWF began in November of 1988 at The Survivor Series where they were a part of a ten team elimination match and battled The Brain Busters (Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson) to a double disqualification eliminating both teams from the match. The Rockers-Brain Busters feud would last into 1989, and the series of matches accomplished the same thing for the duo that the matches with Rose and Somers had in the AWA; by proving to WWF fans that the Rockers weren’t just a couple of pretty boys with flashy moves. They could hold their own with one of the great teams in pro wrestling.

Shawn Michaels, also known as Mr. Wrestlemania made his very first appearance on the supershow at Wrestlemania 5 where The Rockers took on a team called The Twin Towers, Akeem (formerly The One Man Gang) and The Big Bossman (formerly Big Bubba Rogers). The Rockers were defeated but the match went a long way to show that even though they were smaller than most of the wrestlers on the roster, the two men could still hang in the ‘land of the giants.’

The following year at Wrestlemania 6, The Rockers would face the duo of Pat Tanaka and Akio Sato, The Original Orient Express. The two

teams faced each other several times in a series of technically sound matches during this period.

Though Michaels and Jannetty never held the WWF World Tag Team titles, they came very close. In fact, they actually *won* the titles on an occasion, it was just never acknowledged on TV.

The match took place on October 30, 1990. The Rockers faced then champions The Hart Foundation in a rare case of two babyface teams squaring off. During the 2 out of 3 falls encounter the top rope broke. The four carried on with their match and The Rockers won the belts. However, it was eventually decided that the match was not fit to broadcast on TV because of the issue with the rope and thus the WWF scrapped the match from its record books and the title change ‘never happened.’

Legit tension between Michaels and Jannetty began to arise backstage. The two men even got into a fist fight one night when no cameras were around and by the winter of 1991 it was clear that Michaels wanted out of the team.

Of course nothing of the fight was mentioned on TV, but it began to become clear to viewers that there was some (worked) heat between the two men. Several instances took place that led to the team arguing amongst themselves with the final straw being losing a tag team title match to The Legion of Doom.

A couple of weeks later Brutus Beefcake, who at the time hosted an interview segment on WWF TV shows called The Barber Shop, had The Rockers on as his guests. He wanted to help them work through their issues so that they could get back on track as a team. Michaels and Jannetty eventually agreed, shook hands and hugged. Michaels then suckered Jannetty with a superkick to the face, and in a scene that was very out of the ordinary for the WWF at the time, threw Jannetty head first through the

set’s window. Jannetty lay on the floor bleeding as Michaels mocked him, cementing his turn into a full fledged heel.

Michaels and Jannetty would feud with one another off and on for a while following the break up. Shawn, now known as The Heartbreak Kid, adopted a cocky persona and was paired with Sensational Sherri Martel as his manager. Shawn’s career skyrocketed as he would go on to become a multiple time champion in the WWF holding every title from the Intercontinental Championship, to the European Championship, to the World Heavyweight Championship and even the World Tag Team Titles on five occasions with four different partners (“Stone Cold” Steve Austin, Triple H, John Cena and two times with “Diesel” Kevin Nash).

Michaels retired in 2010 after losing a classic match at Wrestlemania 26 to The Undertaker. He was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2011, and is recognized as one of the best in ring performers in wrestling’s history.

Jannetty would return to the WWF a few times over the years. He also had a run with the Intercontinental Title, when he made a surprise return to the Federation after a lengthy absence and upset Michaels for the gold on an episode of Monday Night Raw. Also Jannetty teamed with The 1-2-3 Kid (Sean Waltman) to win the WWF World Tag Team titles in 1994; they’d lose the belts back to the team they’d beaten (The Quebecers, Jacques Rougeau and Carl Oulette) a week later.

In the mid-90s Jannetty made some appearances on the independent circuit, including a few shots for Extreme Championship Wrestling, before returning to the WWF again. This time Jannetty formed a heel team with Leif Cassidy (Al Snow) as The New Rockers, a duo which mocked the nuances used by the original team. The New Rockers were a short lived

duo, however, and Jannetty requested and was granted his release from the promotion once again.

Jannetty spent the next several years bouncing around independent promotions and making a few short stops in both WCW and ECW. He would also team with Tommy Rogers (this was the Tommy Rogers of The Fantastics) at the Heroes of Wrestling pay-per-view in October 1999, losing to The Samoan Swat Team, Samu and The Samoan Savage.

Jannetty returned to the WWE in 2005; this time he was challenged by Kurt Angle to show up as Angle was preparing for a Wrestlemania showdown with Michaels. As a part of his preparation Angle was claiming that he was going to do everything Shawn had done and that included beating Jannetty. During this return to the company fans were treated to a one time reunion of The Rockers as Michaels and Jannetty took on and defeated La Resistance in a match which saw the two men emulate a lot of their maneuvers and style from years before.

Jannetty made a few more appearances for the WWE and at one time was in line for a full time position with the company; that fell through, and Marty continues to appear on the independent circuit.

THE SHEEPHERDERS

One of, if not the most internationally traveled tag teams of all time were Luke Williams and Butch Miller, The Sheepherders.

The duo came together in the mid 1960s and presented themselves much different back then than they would by the dawn of the 1980s.

Wrestling throughout New Zealand and parts of Europe Luke, who began his career using the name “Gorgeous” Teddy Williams became known as “Sweet William” and played a Gorgeous George like effeminate heel, while Butch was known as “The Brute” and would be dragged around on a leash by Sweet William.

The two changed their gimmicks to that of a couple of New Zealand mad men and traveled into North America where they began working as The Kiwis for Stu Hart’s Stampede Wrestling. The duo had a memorable feud with the team of “Rowdy” Roddy Piper and Rick Martel in the Pacific Northwest/British Columbia area. They teamed together in many different countries throughout the 1970s and into the 80s, most notably in Puerto Rico for the World Wrestling Council where they defeated Carlos Colon and Invader I for the WWC North American Tag Team Championship in 1981. They held those titles on two different occasions that year, before losing them for the final time to Jack & Jerry Brisco.

Miller returned to New Zealand for some time at this point and Williams replaced him with Jonathan Boyd to form The “New” Sheepherders. Boyd was no stranger to tag team wrestling himself as he (as Lord Jonathan Boyd) along with his cousin (Norman Frederick Charles III) formed the team “The Royal Kangaroos”, a team that was almost a villainous version of the popular Fabulous Kangaroos. Boyd & Charles were a main event duo in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States, but also saw success in San Francisco, Calgary and other territories in North America. They were known to employ a brutal brawling style, a style that Boyd brought with him into the Sheepherders when he joined Luke Williams in 1981.

Williams and Boyd first made a name for themselves in the Knoxville, TN based Southeastern Championship Wrestling, feuding with

Robert Fuller, Ron Fuller and Jimmy Golden. Williams and Boyd then traveled to Memphis where they would begin one of the longest running blood feuds in tag team wrestling with The Fabulous Ones. Williams and Boyd continued their tear through the southern territories when they went to work for Joe Blanchard's Southwest Championship Wrestling in Texas; there they won the tag team title from Len Denton and Tony Anthony, The Grapplers, after The Grapplers' own manager Don Carson turned on them to help the 'Herders win.

Boyd broke his leg in a car accident which led to Bobby Jaggers substituting for him in a title match against Sweet Brown Sugar and Bob Sweetan. Jaggers and Williams lost the titles and Williams turned on his new partner.

Out with the new and in with the old, Butch Miller reunited with Luke Williams in Southwest Championship Wrestling. Now that the original Sheepherders were back together the duo rekindled the feud from Memphis that Williams and Boyd had started with The Fabulous Ones before heading back to Puerto Rico in 1984.

Meanwhile, Jonathan Boyd made his return to wrestling and teamed up with Rip Morgan to form "The Kiwi Sheepherders". This team competed mainly in Memphis where they again feuded with the Fabulous Ones and then began feuding with The Fantastics in another series of bloody matches. Unfortunately the two versions of the Sheepherders never turned up in the same area at the same time because that match, especially in a place like Memphis where the fans had seen each version of the team, would surely have been a big attraction and a box office success.

After the Kiwi Sheepherders left Memphis, The Sheepherders returned to the United States of America and went to the Mid South Territory (where Bill Watts had just rebranded his promotion the Universal

Wrestling Federation) and dethroned the powerhouse tag team Steve “Dr Death” Williams and Ted Dibiase for the UWF Tag Team Championship. They would lose those titles to Boyd and Morgan’s old nemesis The Fantastics.

Miller and Williams would spend the next couple of years wrestling in the southern United States and making frequent international tours, returning frequently to Puerto Rico. The duo returned to the UWF in the fall of 1987 and took the Tag Team Championship for a second time, defeating Brad Armstrong and Tim Horner. The UWF had gone through a major change by this point as Watts had sold the company to Jim Crockett Jr. and it wasn’t long after the title win that Jim Crockett Promotions dissolved the UWF and brought many of that promotion’s stars, including The Sheepherders, into the NWA. The Sheepherders spent much of the next year battling The Fantastics as well as other teams in the promotion. They competed in the Jim Crockett Sr. Memorial Cup 1988 tournament where they were eliminated by The Midnight Express and were considered top contenders to the United States Tag Team Championship. While this was the highest amount of exposure that the team had received, featured on WTBS on a regular basis, it would actually be the final run of The Sheepherders; in name at least.

In 1989 Luke Williams and Butch Miller, who at the time were 42 and 45 years old respectively, signed a contract with the ever expanding World Wrestling Federation. By this point the WWF was looked at by most long time fans of the sport as being a live action cartoon show geared primarily towards children and casual viewers who didn’t have much interest in watching long competitive matches. Vince & Co. didn’t have any room for the type of violence that The Sheepherders were known for, so it surprised few when the team was completely repackaged. Instead of the blood thirsty

brawlers who seemed to want to stomp their opponent's heads in, Williams and Miller became a team of fun loving, simple minded chaps who were more interested in licking each other's heads on their way to the ring.

"Cousin" Luke and "Cousin" Butch were introduced to WWF fans through a series of comedy vignettes which featured Mean Gene Okerlund as an on site reporter trying to interview the two men who were preoccupied with eating cans of sardines in the grossest fashion possible with their mouths wide open and chunks of food spilling out. The Bushwhackers, as they were now known, made their official WWF debut in January of 1989 and went on to spend most of the year in a feud with The Rougeau Brothers, facing them at Wrestlemania 5, then appearing on opposite teams at The Survivor Series, and then again at the 1990 Royal Rumble. The two teams faced each other many times throughout the year of 1989.

The Bushwhackers were in the WWF for the better part of seven years, feuding with teams like The Bolsheviks (Nicolai Volkoff and Boris Zuhkoff), Rhythm & Blues (Greg Valentine and The Honky Tonk Man), The Natural Disasters (Earthquake and Typhoon), and The Beverly Brothers. They appeared on several pay-per-view events and were featured heavily on the Federation's TV and house shows. While many of those long time wrestling fans may have been disappointed in what became of Williams and Miller from a character standpoint, the fact is that The Bushwhackers were a hit among WWF fans and the duo undoubtedly made a lot of money there in the twilight of their careers. Their exposure and popularity in the WWF also crossed over to prime time network television when they made a guest appearance as themselves on an episode of the ABC sitcom Family Matters.

Williams and Miller left the WWF in 1996 and spent the next several years appearing around the world for various promotions. In 1997 they

wrestled again as The Sheepherders against Invaders I and II at the 24th anniversary show for WWC in Puerto Rico. In 1998 they were revealed as extended members of the Dudley family in ECW. In 1999 they defeated Iron Sheik and Nikolai Volkoff on the Heroes of Wrestling pay-per-view. In 2001 they were featured again at Wrestlemania as participants in the "Gimmick Battle Royal", a match promoted as featuring several of WWF's greatest "gimmicks".

The 21st century has seen both men wind down their careers. In 2001 Miller suffered a serious neck injury which led to a bout with septicemia. After that scare, Miller retired from active competition, but has remained involved in the sport as commissioner of New Zealand's Kiwi Pro Wrestling, a promotion founded by none other than Rip Morgan. Morgan and Miller have been running shows since 2006, and in October of 2012 Bushwhacker Luke made a special appearance at the promotion's annual Halloween Howl show. Yes, Williams is still active; his career has spanned four decades and he continues to make appearances all over the independent scene and still gets in the ring to perform on occasion.

Whatever name you remember them by, Luke Williams and Butch Miller, with over 25 championships to their credit, deserve to be considered one of the great tag teams in the history of professional wrestling.

The British Bulldogs

Perhaps the most popular tag team the WWF employed in the 1980s were these two cousins from the United Kingdom. Davey Boy Smith and

The Dynamite Kid were brother's in law of Bret Hart, and were acquired by Vince & Co. during the buyout of Stampede Wrestling early in the decade.

Tom Billington began his career in England where he was trained by Ted Betley as a teenager. In 1975 Billington took on the name The Dynamite Kid and quickly gained a reputation throughout Europe for his intensity and high flying style in the ring.

On a tour of the UK, Bruce Hart was awestruck by the young man and recommended him highly to his Father, Stu. Dynamite would move to Canada and begin wowing audiences throughout the Stampede territory in matches against Bruce, Bret, and Keith Hart, among other members of the roster.

In 1979 Kid made his first tour of Japan for International Pro Wrestling. Kid's unique acrobatic style was a big hit with fans, and before long he began splitting his time between Stampede and New Japan Pro Wrestling. In NJPW, Kid would gain more fame for himself through a series of highly acclaimed matches with Satoru Sayama, better known as the original Tiger Mask.

With the success they had seen with Dynamite Kid, it was no surprise when the Hart family recruited his cousin Davey Boy Smith to tour the territory as well. Smith came to Calgary and the two cousins squared off for a long time as opponents before becoming a tag team. The two continued to wrestle for Stampede aside from making frequent trips to Japan originally for NJPW before jumping ship to All Japan Pro Wrestling.

In 1984 the two joined Bret Hart and Jim Neidhart in the World Wrestling Federation, where the four men would put on some of the most exciting tag team matches of all time, rivaling the masterpiece quality bouts that The Midnight Express and The Rock N Roll Express were having at the same

time in the NWA.

In 1986 Davey Boy and Dynamite, known in the WWF as The British Bulldogs, became top contenders to the World Tag Team Championship held by Greg “The Hammer” Valentine and Brutus Beefcake, The Dream Team. The two teams faced each other at Wrestlemania 2 with the titles on the line. After several minutes of back and forth action, “The Hammer” grabbed Davey Boy in a headlock and Smith pushed him off into the Bulldog’s corner where Dynamite was perched on the second turnbuckle outside the ring. Valentine’s head hit Dynamite’s with such force that Kid flew backwards to the arena floor below and Valentine collapsed in the ring allowing Davey Boy Smith the to pin him for the win and the titles. The Bulldogs celebrated the title win with their manager Captain Lou Albano and rock legend Ozzy Osbourne, who was also in their corner.

The Bulldogs would go on to defend their titles successfully through the rest of 1986 against teams like Valentine and Beefcake, Iron Sheik and Nikolai Volkoff, and the massive duo of King Kong Bundy and “Big” John Studd. But in January of 1987, The Bulldogs would once again meet The Hart Foundation in a match broadcast on WWF’s Superstars of Wrestling show, and would spell the end of the Bulldog’s reign as champions.

Dynamite Kid’s wrestling style combined with his liberal use of steroids had done severe damage to his physical well being, and by the end of 1986 it was catching up to him. Kid had to take time off from the WWF during the Bulldog’s reign and was going to have to take even more time off at the beginning of 1987.

One night as Kid and Smith made their way to the ring, sans-Albano (who’d recently left the WWF), and accompanied by their new mascot Matilda (an actual bulldog), were attacked by the Harts, who used their manager Jimmy Hart’s megaphone to lay Kid out on the floor rendering

him unable to compete in the match. This acted as a cover-up to hide the fact that Kid legitimately could not wrestle.

Kid's condition as a result of the megaphone attack was not a far stretch from the truth as Dynamite has said that he needed Davey Boy's help even walking to the ring that night.

Danny Davis, who was a referee that had been transitioning into a heel wrestler at the time, allowed the match to go on two-on-one and The Hart Foundation defeated Davey Boy Smith for the World Tag Team Championship.

Davis was "suspended" shortly after this match and joined Jimmy Hart and The Hart Foundation as a wrestler. Davis, Hart and Neidhart would team up against Tito Santana, Davey Boy Smith and a returning Dynamite Kid on March 29 at Wrestlemania 3.

The Bulldogs spent the rest of 1987 chasing The Hart Foundation and the World Tag Team Titles. At the end of the year they began feuding with Bobby Heenan's newest team, The Islanders (Haku and Tama) when the three heels "dognapped" Matilda and alluded to having done something terrible to the dog. Don't worry; no animals were harmed during the making of this storyline.

Matilda was fine and reunited with Davey Boy and Dynamite in time for Wrestlemania 4, which saw the duo in another six man tag team match where they teamed with Koko B. Ware to face The Islanders and Bobby "The Brain" Heenan.

At the end of 1988, The Bulldogs left the WWF and returned to their old stomping grounds Stampede Wrestling (which Stu had reopened shortly after he'd sold the company to McMahon) and quickly took the International Tag Team Championship; which they held for about a month before dropping the titles to The Karachi Vice (Makhan and Vokkan Singh).

The title loss led to Kid turning on Davey Boy and the two began feuding once again in Stampede, while simultaneously still teaming as The British Bulldogs in All Japan Pro Wrestling.

Davey Boy Smith returned to the WWF in 1990 as The British Bulldog, a name he'd trademarked years before.

Dynamite took on Johnny Smith as a partner in a team called The British Bruisers. Johnny Smith was no relation, though shared many similarities with both Dynamite and Davey Boy as he'd also been trained by Ted Betley before making his pro debut. He was given the name Smith when he came into Stampede Wrestling where he was billed as Davey Boy's younger brother.

The British Bruisers teamed for over a year in AJPW when Kid's injuries again forced him to take time off. He would return to the ring after a year and a half, when in the summer of 1993 The British Bruisers reunited in a losing effort against Tsuyoshi Kikuchi and Jun Akiyama.

Kid wrestled his final match in October 1996 for Michinoku Pro Wrestling in Japan, where he teamed with Dos Caras and Kuniaki Kobayashi in a six man tag team match and defeated Mil Mascaras, The Great Sasuke and Tiger Mask.

Due to his in ring style and steroid abuse, Tom "Dynamite Kid" Billington was confined to a wheel chair in 1997. In 1999, Billington worked with author Alison Coleman in writing his autobiography "Pure Dynamite".

Davey Boy Smith's career after returning to the World Wrestling Federation in 1990 included a high profile singles rivalry with Bret Hart over the Intercontinental Championship, which Smith won in the main event of Summerslam '92 at Wembley Stadium in London, England.

Smith spent most of the 1990s bouncing between WWF and WCW. In 1993 he challenged Big Van Vader for the WCW World Title, and had a high profile feud teaming with Sting against Vader and Sid Vicious. He returned to the WWF in 1994 at Summerslam where he was in the audience during the main event steel cage match between Bret and Owen Hart. Bulldog got involved in the match leading to a partnership with Bret against Owen and Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart.

Smith eventually turned heel, taking on Jim Cornette as his manager and forming a team with Owen. Owen and Smith won the WWF World Tag Team Title and eventually reunited with Bret, Jim Neidhart and Brian Pillman as a faction called "The Hart Foundation." Smith and Neidhart left the WWF after the fallout from the infamous "Montreal screw job" at Survivor Series 97, and joined Bret Hart in WCW. Inexplicably, neither Davey or Neidhart actually "joined" Bret on TV in WCW, even though the Hart Foundation group had been a very hot commodity in the WWF just a short period earlier; instead both men were relegated to the under card.

In September of 1998 Davey Boy and Neidhart teamed up against Alex Wright and The Disco Inferno at WCW's Fall Brawl. Smith took a bump in a portion of the ring where a trap door had been set up as a part of a stunt later for The Ultimate Warrior. The impact caused an injury that later led to an infection that almost paralyzed Smith. He was out of action for six months as a result. While recuperating from the injury, he received a FedEx stating that WCW was terminating his contract.

Smith returned to the WWF for the last time in the summer of 1999, and was released in 2000.

Davey Boy began training his son Harry (David Hart Smith) and the two teamed together on the independent circuit in Canada.

Tragically Davey Boy Smith suffered a heart attack on May 18, 2002 ending his life at the age of just 39 years old.

The Four Horsemen
(The Minnesota Wrecking Crew/The Brain Busters)

Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson are going to be forever recognized as a tag team that personified the word “greatness”. The team had successful runs in both the WWF, as members of The Bobby Heenan Family and the NWA as members of The Four Horsemen. However, the team would not have come to be if it had not been for the Minnesota Wrecking Crew or The Andersons.

So in an attempt to pay homage to a couple of different teams within the context of this bio, let’s start at the beginning:

Lars & Gene Anderson

Gene Anderson, who by the way, was the original and only “Anderson” of the family, was a skilled collegiate wrestler who successfully transitioned into the world of professional wrestling after training under legendary wrestler and promoter Verne Gagne in Minnesota. In 1965 he teamed with Larry Heinemi, who changed his name to Lars Anderson. The two worked together as the Minnesota Wrecking Crew and won the Georgia version of the NWA World Tag Team Championship in 1967.

Lars struck out on his own working in several different territories including San Francisco (where he and Paul Demarco captured that territories’ version of the NWA World Tag Team Title) and the AWA back in Minnesota where he replaced Harley Race as Larry Hennig’s tag team

partner. Eventually Heinemi wound down his career in Hawaii, wrestling and booking for Polynesian Pro Wrestling.

After Lars left the team, Gene sought out a new partner and created one of the most legendary and iconic tag teams of any generation.

Gene & Ole Anderson

When people talk about The Minnesota Wrecking Crew, or The Andersons, especially among those who are old enough to remember, they are usually talking about Gene & Ole. The infamous *Anderson style of wrestling* was perfected by this team. Their psychology was simple but very effective; in each match they picked one of the limbs of their opponents and focused their entire offense on inflicting pain on it.

The duo teamed together for several years and had over 20 different reigns with a variety of tag team championships including the NWA Mid-Atlantic, Atlantic Coast and Georgia titles among others.

Gene & Ole teamed together until 1981 when Gene retired from active wrestling.

Ole would go on to find another partner, a babyface hero in Georgia named Thunderbolt Patterson. Patterson & Anderson won the NWA National Tag Team Championship and remained a popular team until Ole's "cousin" Arn Anderson began making a name for himself in Mid Atlantic Championship Wrestling. Ole took notice of his family member's success and began to show interest in reforming The Minnesota Wrecking Crew with Arn. Thunderbolt questioned Ole on a TV interview and in a very realistic promo Ole notified 'Bolt that he was tired of carrying guys like him, Tommy Rich and Dusty Rhodes, and said that he saw the future of the Anderson family in Arn.

At this time, however, Ole and Patterson were still National Tag team champions; that combined with the low key confrontation between Ole and Thunderbolt set up what happened on an episode of World Championship Wrestling perfectly.

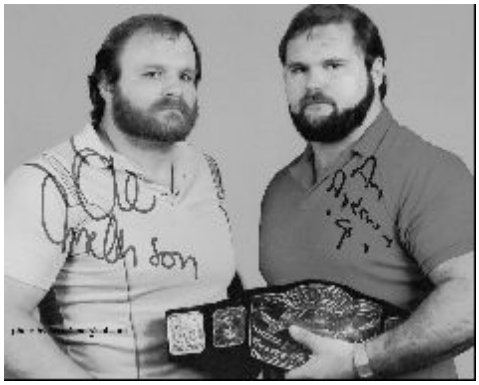
There was a match between Arn Anderson and Manny Fernandez; two men who'd been feuding for a while. Ole came to ringside to commentate the match and at one point got into a verbal confrontation with Fernandez. Ole and Manny began fighting at ringside and Arn came down to help his cousin. This two-on-one attack brought out Thunderbolt who simply asked Ole why he was doing this. Arn attacked 'Bolt from behind and brought him into the ring where the two began to brawl. Ole stood at ringside watching for a moment before he jumped into the fray and helped Arn double team his own partner. This led to Ole and Thunderbolt each putting up their own half of the NWA National Tag Team Championship in a match where Patterson and his partner Manny Fernandez lost to Ole and Arn Anderson.

Ole and Arn Anderson

Ole & Arn picked up where Ole & Gene had left off in displaying the "Anderson Style."

They continued to feud with Patterson and Fernandez before breaking off into battles with other teams of the era. It was during this version of the Wrecking Crew that they joined their kayfabe cousin Ric Flair, Tully Blanchard and his manager James J. Dillon on TV for an interview. Arn used the now infamous line "the last time so much havoc has been caused by so few, you'd have to go all the way back to the four horsemen of the apocalypse", thus branding the group The Four Horsemen.

Arn and Ole remained, primarily, a tag team until 1987 when dissension in the ranks of the group began to come up. Ole was taking some time off apparently to spend with his young son. On a TV interview Ole was discussing the past of the Horsemen saying that the original group was actually he, Arn, Gene and Flair. “When Gene got hurt we let an outsider in,” he said, referring to Blanchard. Later in the program Tully was being interviewed and he took offense to Ole’s comment which led to a



confrontation between the two. Tully called Ole’s son a snot-nosed kid, which infuriated Anderson and he punched Blanchard in the face. Later in the program JJ Dillon was interviewed and he called Ole out to apologize for being a hot head. Ole came out and smacked Dillon to the delight of the fans. Blanchard rushed Ole and tackled him and the two began to brawl on the studio floor. The following week Arn Anderson was interviewed about the situation. He said that his allegiance lied with the Four Horsemen, not Ole. Dillon told Arn that “from this moment forward we are your family, and we wash our hands of Ole Anderson.”

With Ole officially out of the Horsemen a void was created in more ways than one. First, there were now three wrestlers in the group. That was a simple fix, however, since rookie Lex Luger had already been introduced on television as an associate; but The Horsemen had always had a contingent in the tag team ranks and with Ole gone there were basically 4 single wrestlers. Soon that void would be filled.

Arn Anderson & Tully Blanchard

As discussed earlier in the book, Arn and Tully were, in many ways, the prototype for a perfect heel tandem. Arn's no nonsense style fit perfectly as a counter weight to Tully's braggadocios persona. In the ring, from bell to bell, they were second to none.

Blanchard and Anderson captured the NWA World Tag Team Championship in the fall of 1987, defeating The Rock N Roll Express. They would wear the championships for the rest of that year. 1988 saw another defection from the Horsemen as Lex Luger left the group. Luger teamed with Horsemen nemesis Barry Windham to defeat Tully & Arn in March of 1987 at the first ever Clash of the Champions live on WTBS, to capture the straps. Their reign didn't last long, however, as a month later during a match where they were defending the championship against Tully & Arn, Windham turned on Luger. Blanchard and Anderson were once again World Tag Team Champions, and Barry was officially a member of the Four Horsemen.

Towards the end of 1988, Blanchard and Anderson began feuding with fellow heel team The Midnight Express. Their matches were a wrestling fan's dream, which many thought would never happen because both teams were considered "bad guys". On September 10, 1988, almost one year to the day after winning the NWA World Tag Team Titles for the first time, Tully and Arn lost the belts for the last time to The Express in Philadelphia, PA. Of course it was no coincidence that the title changed hands at the same time that Tully and Arn decided to leave Jim Crockett Promotions and the NWA.

Tully and Arn resurfaced less than a month later in the WWF, now with Bobby "The Brain" Heenan as their manager, and adopting the team

name of “The Brain Busters”, Tully and Arn changed very little about their own appearance or in ring style, which was a rarity for this time in the WWF. Many wrestlers from other promotions were given new names or new personas, Big Bubba Rodgers, Terry Taylor, Curt Hennig and Ted Dibiase became The Big Bossman, The Red Rooster, Mr. Perfect and The Million Dollar Man; but Tully and Arn basically remained unchanged.

The Brain Busters spent the rest of 1988 and into 1989 feuding with Shawn Michaels and Marty Jannetty, The Rockers, as the two teams presented some tremendous matches. Aside from this series, the acquisition of the team by the WWF led to fans being able to witness some dream matches; the best of the NWA vs. the best of the WWF. Arn & Tully faced Tito Santana and Rick Martel at Wrestlemania 5, The Hart Foundation at Summerslam 89, and WWF World Tag Team Champions Demolition in a series of matches including one on July 18, 1989 wherein the Brain Busters won the titles; which they kept until October when they lost them back to Demolition.

The Brain Busters faced The Rockers on Saturday Night’s Main Event on NBC in a two out of three falls match. The Rockers won the first fall, which infuriated Heenan and he left ringside. Tully & Arn won the second fall, but were fired by Heenan anyway. The third fall went to The

Rockers. This match was actually taped for TV on October 31st but it wouldn't air until two days after The Survivor Series 1989 on November 23.

At the Survivor Series the scheduled main event was to see The Ultimate Warrior, Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart and The Rockers take on Andre "The Giant", Haku, and The Brain Busters. However, Tully was not allowed to wrestle that night due to a failed drug test. Bobby Heenan took his place and they played up the absence of Blanchard as part of a storyline dissension within the "Heenan Family" leading to the aforementioned firing which aired two days later on Saturday Night's Main Event.

Tully and Arn were actually scheduled to return to the NWA to reunite The Four Horsemen with Flair, but when word got out that Tully had failed the test his deal with the now Ted Turner owned promotion disappeared. Tully and Arn would never team together again.

Arn & Ole….again.

In the year that Arn and Tully were gone from the NWA (now operating under the name World Championship Wrestling) a lot had changed, especially as it pertained to their Horsemen cohorts. First, shortly after they left the NWA JJ Dillon followed; he wound up in the WWF working in the office, never appearing on television in a prominent role.

Flair and Windham brought in Hiro Matsuda as their new manager. Flair had a famous series of matches against the returning Ricky Steamboat, including a match on February 20, 1989 where Flair lost the World Title in Chicago, and one where he regained it on May 7 in Nashville, TN. At the conclusion of that match Flair was confronted by ringside judge Terry Funk,

who challenged the new champ for a shot at the title. When Flair refused Funk attacked him and pile drove him on a table, “breaking” Flair’s neck. Flair would return two months later as a babyface and feud with Funk throughout the rest of 1989.

Terry Funk joined manager Gary Hart’s J-Tex Corporation, which also included Japanese sensation The Great Muta, Buzz Sawyer and The Dragon Master. So even with Flair’s new partnership with former rival Sting, the numbers were still in Funk’s favor. The odds evened up, however, in December of 1989 when Flair appeared inside the ring to call Gary Hart out. Flair told Hart that he had a surprise, but Hart ignored him and brought out Muta, Sawyer and The Dragon Master. Facing 3 on 1 odds, Flair seemed surprisingly unfazed as he punched Muta and was immediately attacked. His surprise was revealed in the form of Arn and Ole Anderson, a moment which earned a huge reaction from the live crowd, as Flair, Arn and Ole cleaned house.

Ole and Arn would team together into 1990 until Ole retired and became the manager of the group.

The rest of Arn Anderson’s career saw him form several combinations earning him praise as being one of the greatest tag team wrestlers of all time; a true master of the art of Tag Team Wrestling.

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